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CHINA DAILY

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Global firms confident in China's growth

Decoupling infeasible, will hamper recovery of world economy, execs say

By **FAN FEIFEI, MA SI** and **OUYANG SHIJIA**

Multinational corporations have voiced optimism and confidence in China's long-term potential for economic growth, despite mounting external uncertainties such as the potential risks of decoupling and supply chain disruptions.

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They also are beefing up efforts to expand their presence in the world's second-largest economy through further investment and localized operations.

Economists and industry insiders said any intention of decoupling from China is clearly infeasible and against the historical currents, and attempts to do so would hamper the recovery of the world economy, which is suffering from high inflation and downside risks.

They also highlighted China's economic resilience and pivotal position in global industrial and supply chains.

Their comments came as Bloomberg quoted anonymous sources as saying that United States President Joe Biden aims to sign an executive order limiting investment by US businesses in key parts of China's economy, around the time of the summit of the Group of Seven advanced economies, which is scheduled to start on Friday in Japan.

Hideki Ozawa, president and CEO of Canon China, said: "The anti-globalization trend has not affected the development of Canon's business in China or the relationship between Canon and our Chinese partners. On the contrary, China's opening-up remains a significant source of new opportunities for Canon."

Ozawa said that with the upgrading of China's industries and consumption, domestic demand for overseas high-end manufacturing and high-tech services is growing rapidly, and Canon will seize the opportunity and continue to extend and deepen cooperation with its Chinese partners.

"The Chinese economy is very resilient, and China is the most important market for Canon. Canon is confident in the Chinese market. … We will establish a more comprehensive supply chain from research and development to production and sales in China, and invest more here," he added.

Frank Meng, chairman of Qualcomm China, said the company has always been optimistic about the long-term development of the Chinese economy and will continue to increase investment and expand cooperation in China.

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Palestinians in Gaza City celebrate on Saturday the announcement of an Egypt-brokered cease-fire agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group. RIZEK ABDELJAWAD / XINHUA

Lasting peace urged amid Israel-Palestine cease-fire

By **JAN YUMUL** in Hong Kong
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An Egypt-brokered cease-fire between Israel and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip has raised hopes of easing the humanitarian disaster of Palestinians, but finding a lasting peace should be the focus for the region, analysts said.

After five days of tit-for-tat fighting that killed 33 Palestinians and one Israeli, and injured almost 150 people, Israel and the PIJ agreed to end the bloody confrontation on Saturday.

However, a few minutes after the cease-fire took effect, militants fired around 20 rockets from the Gaza Strip at southern Israel, Xinhua News Agency reported. Israeli fighter jets fired back and targeted lookout posts and sites of the Gaza militants. No injuries were reported.

Palestinian sources close to the PIJ told Xinhua that calm returned to the Gaza Strip after a short exchange of fire between the militants and the Israeli army.

Dozens of Palestinians in Gaza took to the streets and squares. Loudspeakers sounded in some mosques to celebrate the cease-fire agreement, while a procession was organized for medical, ambulance, civil defense and police teams.

The PIJ was founded in 1981 by Palestinian students in Egypt with the aim of establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza and other areas illegally occupied by Israel, said a report by Al-Jazeera television.

Muhammad al-Hindi, a senior PIJ leader, told Cairo News Television that the agreement was reached "as a result of a continuation of the Egyptian effort".

Al-Hindi, who was part of the negotiations, said that "the cease-fire agreement includes stopping targeting civilians, homes and individuals." He added, "We will abide by the cease-fire agreement as long as the Israeli enemy adheres to it."

In a statement, the Israeli Prime Minister's Office expressed appreciation for Egypt's efforts to mediate the cease-fire. National Security Council Director Tzachi Hanegbi said that Israel's acceptance of the Egyptian initiative means that "quiet will be met with quiet".

Over five days, Israeli fighter jets and unmanned drones attacked Palestinian operatives that were launching rockets at Israel. Israel targeted buildings, military sites, posts and facilities that belong to the PIJ armed wing, Al-Quds Brigades.

On Wednesday and Thursday, the militants fired hundreds of rockets at central and southern Israel, killing one Israeli and injuring more than nine, according to Israeli media outlets.

"Although the Palestinians in Gaza have lost many casualties over the last five days, their resistance was united and disciplined," said Muslim Imran, director at the Asia Middle East Center for Research and Dialogue. "The joint command of Palestinian resistance factions has once again passed the test and denied Israel any political gains," Imran said.

"In the long run, this Israeli failure and Palestinian unity will encourage the solidification of Palestinian resistance in Gaza and the rest of Palestine," he added.

'Temporary relief'

The cease-fire "will bring temporary relief until the next round of conflict, which is inevitable given the brutal nature of occupation of Gaza and the West Bank," said Jawaid Iqbal, chairman of the Department of West Asian Studies and North African Studies at Aligarh Muslim University in Uttar Pradesh, India.

*See **Cease-fire**, page 3*

GUILIN MAKES GREATER STRIDES IN MODERNIZATION

City builds on Red Army legacy, blazes path of green development

By **DONG JIDONG**
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indepth

For Wang Deli, a 42-year-old grape grower in Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, the road to rural modernization is typified by his 0.87-hectare vineyard, where grape vines flourish in the spring sunshine.

Two years ago, President Xi Jinping visited Wang's home in Maozhushan village and chatted with the farmer's family during an inspection tour of the region.

Now, more certificates of merit for Wang's daughters, Wang Jia'nan, 13, and Wang Zixuan, 11, adorn one wall of the property, where shelves display local specialties such as packaged rice noodles, bottled sliced pepper and fried fish. Together with the vineyard they earned the family an annual income of 150,000 yuan ($21,550) last year, a rise of 10,000 yuan from 2021.

"We are sincerely grateful to the visit by President Xi, who encouraged us to live a better life through diligence and intelligence. I am now also running a homestay, one of six in the village," said Wang, who was elected a deputy to the Guangxi regional people's congress in January.

During his visit, Xi called for efforts to pursue rural vitalization based on local specialties and for the better use of science and technology to promote the agricultural sector.

*See **Guilin**, page 2*

Consumption boom continues on Mother's Day weekend

By **ZHU WENQIAN**
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The domestic travel market embraced another peak during the weekend, as many consumers took short trips to celebrate Mother's Day, which fell on Sunday, carrying forward the May Day holiday consumption momentum.

Consumers, many of them young mothers born in the 1980s and 1990s, traveled locally or to nearby regions to celebrate the occasion. Over the national level, women accounted for nearly 60 percent of consumers who traveled, according to Tuniu, an online travel agency based in Nanjing, Jiangsu province.

"Young mothers made self-driving trips to theme parks, zoos, botanical gardens and beaches along with their children. Beijing WTown, Universal Beijing Resort and Shanghai Disneyland were among popular choices for local consumers," said Qi Chunguang, vice-president of Tuniu.

With the gradual resumption of more international flights and a drop in ticket prices to many overseas destinations, some middle-aged and elderly consumers also opted to travel abroad. Over the weekend, the Maldives, Thailand, New Zealand, Indonesia and Singapore were among preferred outbound destinations for Chinese mainland travelers, according to Tuniu.

A child hugs her mother on Saturday at a kindergarten in Congjiang county, Guizhou province. A series of activities was held in the county's schools to mark Mother's Day, which fell on Sunday. LONG MENGQIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Meanwhile, the online retail market benefited as people bought gifts — from flowers, clothes and cosmetics to home appliance and gold jewelry — for their mothers on multiple e-commerce platforms. Flowers such as carnations and Chinese peonies were in high demand, according to data from online retailer Vipshop.

Chen Lin, a woman who works with an internet company in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, bought a set of portable, outdoor table and chairs online for her mother, hoping her family can go camping more often.

On e-commerce platform JD, cosmetics, home appliances and jewelry were the top three gift categories. Between April 1 and Mother's Day, spending on household appliances on the platform soared 128 percent year-on-year.

Transaction values of window-cleaning robots, wall-mounted washing machines and intelligent dryers all rose by more than 100 percent year-on-year, JD found.

According to Vipshop, health product sales recorded a nearly tenfold surge year-on-year during the two weeks leading to Mother's Day, as consumers paid more attention to keeping healthy in post-pandemic times.

For instance, Yao Hong, an employee of a company, bought a bottle of imported probiotic drink in addition to flowers and a sweater for his mother.

Fu Yifu, a senior research fellow at the Star Atlas Institute of Finance, said: "Holiday consumption can help drive economic recovery and growth. The government and retailers may create more consumption scenarios, upgrade consumption experiences and further spur consumer willingness to spend."

Developing the night economy to extend the time of spending and launching themed shopping festivals integrated with local cultural elements can be helpful, Fu added.

Fan Feifei contributed to this story.

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Equestrian event sets stage for Asian Games

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PAGE TWO

Visitors take a trip on the Lijiang River, which flows through Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. CAO YIMING / XINHUA

Guilin: *Efforts to attract tourists rewarded*

From page 1

Grapes were first grown in Maozhushan, a once-impoverished village covering an area of 60 hectares and with a population of 156, in 2002. Many young villagers who moved to big cities as migrant workers gradually returned and were employed in the grape industry.

Wang Xinming, the village chief, said vineyards in the village now cover more than 21 hectares and can produce over 500,000 kilograms of grapes annually, generating revenue of more than 3.5 million yuan each year. The villagers' per capita disposable income reached 38,000 yuan last year, he added.

Moreover, Maozhushan has become a well-known destination for rural tourism. Wang Qing, a local tour guide, said that last year the village received more than 300,000 visits from tourists.

With help from technicians at the Guangxi Academy of Agricultural Sciences, the villagers have also started planting high-quality grape varieties such as Shine Muscat and Queen Nina, which are much more expensive than ordinary varieties.

Wang Deli said he planted the new varieties on about 20 percent of the land in his vineyard and will gradually expand the growing area. Newly installed drip irrigation equipment significantly reduces the production cost compared with a traditional irrigation system using pipelines, said the farmer, who expects a bumper harvest in August.

Development plan

The changes made in Maozhushan epitomize Guilin's efforts to promote the integrated development of tourism, rural vitalization and culture in recent years.

The city, renowned for its mountains and beautiful rivers, has made full play of its advantages in areas such as tourism, agriculture and cultural heritage to advance on the path to modernization.

During this year's five-day May Day holiday, which started on April 29, the city received more than 4.35 million visits by tourists, and its tourism revenue reached 4.57 billion yuan, rises of 130 percent and nearly 126 percent, respectively, compared with the same period in 2019, the city's culture and tourism bureau reported. Both rises were higher than those at national level during the holiday.

This achievement has been attributed to the local government's efforts to strengthen ecological protection and build Guilin into a world-class tourist destination, as required by President Xi.

While inspecting a section of the picturesque Lijiang River in the city on April 25, 2021, Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, hailed the waterway as the one-and-only treasure in China and the world, and emphasized protection of the river's ecological environment.

The river used to be severely polluted due to quarrying, sand mining and sewage discharge, but its water quality has greatly improved. A total of 5.49 billion yuan was earmarked for a three-year ecological restoration project for the waterway, which started last year. Nearly 900,000 square meters of former illegal sand mining sites were readapted for use elsewhere. Last year, the authorities in Guilin designated April 25 as Lijiang River Protection Day to improve local residents' awareness of ecological protection.

Moreover, the city announced in January last year that the scenic area of Xiangbishan, or Elephant Trunk Hill, which Xi visited on April 26, 2021, during his inspection trip, would open free of charge to visitors.

Top: Visitors learn about the Xiangjiang River Battle at the Fenghuangzui ferry crossing in Guilin. DONG JIDONG / CHINA DAILY **Left and right:** Farmers harvest grapes at Maozhushan village, Guilin. LU BOAN / XINHUA

Xi praised the move during a group discussion with the Guangxi regional delegation at the 20th CPC National Congress in October, citing the fact that tourism revenue in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, rose, rather than fell, after the city canceled entrance fees for tourists to its landmark West Lake.

Dabitou International Tourist Resort in Quanzhou county serves as an example of Guilin's development strategy of integrating tourism with rural vitalization.

After the resort was established in October 2019, residents of Dabitou, a former hillside village, worked at the resort, which features residential buildings from the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911) and recreational facilities such as hot springs, light shows and ecological farms.

With total investment of 5 billion yuan, the resort enables tourists to experience activities such as camping, rice planting and feeding spotted deer — offering an idyllic rural lifestyle.

During the May Day holiday, the resort received more than 29,500 visitors and recorded revenue of over 1.26 million yuan, Guilin culture and tourism bureau data show.

Red tourism

Guilin has also built on its status as an important revolutionary site, where a large number of Red Army soldiers died 88 years ago in a heroic battle along the Xiangjiang River. The city has also blazed a trail for the integrated development of tourism and revolutionary heritage resources.

In Quanzhou, the Xiangjiang River Battle Memorial Hall, which is about 5 kilometers from Maozhushan, has welcomed more than 14 million visits since it first opened in September 2019. The hall was named a base of Party and national historic education in 2021.

During the seven-day battle in November 1934, the Red Army, which was outnumbered by Kuomintang forces armed with much better weaponry, fought fearlessly against enemy forces while experiencing significant losses. Red Army members, with an average age of 20, were reduced from 86,000 when the Long March started in October that year to 30,000.

Jiang Chengbo, a narrator at the memorial hall, said the battle, which centered on control of three key ferry crossings along the Xiangjiang River, was so fierce that the bodies of fallen Red Army soldiers piled up in the water, turning it red. He added that according to a local saying, Guilin residents vowed after the battle not to drink water from the river for three years and not to eat fish from the waterway for 10 years in memory of the Red Army.

When Xi visited the memorial hall on April 25, 2021, he paid his respects to revolutionary martyrs. He said the Xiangjiang battle was a heroic battle of the Long March and an important historical event that determined the "life or death" of the Chinese revolution. In the face of even greater difficulty, one should think about the Long March and the battle, he said, adding that revolutionary beliefs should be carried forward.

Huang Gexin, a professor of Party history studies at the Party School of the Guilin CPC Committee, said the battle laid a solid foundation for the Zunyi Meeting in January 1935, which established Chairman Mao Zedong's leadership role in the Party and pointed the Chinese revolution in the right direction. Despite its large number of casualties, the Red Army's backbone forces survived, including dozens of commanders who later became major Party and State leaders, Huang said.

All-out efforts are being made in Quanzhou to build a section of the Long March National Cultural Park, which stretches across 15 provincial-level regions along the route of the 12,500-km epic Long March. The project will connect three key ferry crossings along the Xiangjiang River — Daping, Fenghuangzui and Pingshan — with a pedestrian walk as part of the nation's efforts to promote red tourism. Construction of the national cultural park is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

Osmanthus city

In addition to its picturesque landscape and revolutionary legacy, Guilin, which literally means "forest of osmanthus" in Chinese, is known as a production base for osmanthus flowers, which have been planted in the city for more than 2,500 years.

The osmanthus was named Flower of the City in 1984, and Guilin is now home to 14,000 hectares of the plants and produces 10,000 metric tons of them annually, accounting for 60 percent of the national output and generating revenue of 3 billion yuan, Guilin forestry and garden bureau data show.

Guilin has also built a complete industrial chain that integrates osmanthus plantation, processing and tourism. In the city's Xiufeng district, the Osmanthus Commune, a national AAAA (the second-highest level) scenic zone themed on osmanthus culture, has received more than 170,000 visits since it first opened in April 2021.

Chen Yanhong, general manager of the commune, said his company aims to make osmanthus-related products, including cakes, tea and liquor, a signature specialty of Guilin, like flower cake in Yunnan province and pineapple cake in Taiwan. He added that he hopes more tourists from around the world will learn about Guilin's osmanthus culture through the commune.

Local delicacy

Along with osmanthus products, packaged rice noodles are another "must" for tourists visiting Guilin to take home.

Tan Huiyue, head of the Guilin Rice Noodle Industry Association, said there are nearly 3,000 rice noodle restaurants in the city, with more than 1 million bowls of the noodles sold every day.

In May 2021, Guilin's rice noodle-making technique was added to the national intangible cultural heritage list.

Huang Hai, chairman of the Guilin Gourmet Association, said that compared with the *luosifen*, or river snail rice noodles, of Liuzhou and the *laoyoufen*, or old friend rice noodles, of Nanning, which are also in Guangxi, Guilin rice noodles are cheaper but have richer ingredients.

In 2019, the city government issued a guiding document to promote the development of Guilin's rice noodle industry. The city is expected to build a complete industrial chain for rice noodle production by 2025, and the value of the industrial chain will reach 20 billion yuan, the document states.

Huang said the government should make more efforts to standardize the city's rice noodle industry, publicize the brand of Guilin rice noodles and encourage local businesses to set up more branches nationwide.

Visitors pay their respects to revolutionary martyrs at the Xiangjiang River Battle Memorial Park. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

Intl equestrian event sets stage for Asian Games

By MA ZHENHUAN in Hangzhou
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The First China Hangzhou (Tonglu) International Equestrian Open kicked off on Saturday in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, in a bid to test the Tonglu Equestrian Centre and perfect services for the Asian Games later this year.

A total of six gold medals for jumping at different heights — 90 centimeters, 100-110 cm, and 110-120 cm — were up for grabs during the two-day event.

Since all the horses for the open competition were offered by the organizing committee, the athletes and horses were matched at random, making the competition a bigger challenge.

Forty-eight horses were shipped from Europe to the equine disease-free zone in Tonglu county to take part in the event.

"I have spent four days with my horse, Kumara, and I am quite satisfied with our cooperation today," Amanda Fang, an 11-year-old rider from the United States, said on Saturday.

During the 90-cm jumping competition, Fang, who has participated in equestrian activities for seven years, successfully crossed 12 obstacles with Kumara.

Fang was very impressed by the state-of-the-art venue, which she said is perfectly equipped for elite competitions, especially show jumping.

John Vallance of Austria, who designed the show jumping course, said the design standards vary depending on the age and training level of the horse, the age and ability of the rider, the dimensions of the obstacles, and the way the obstacles are positioned.

Zou Jianhua, deputy secretary-general of the venue operation team in the Tonglu competition area of the Asian Games, said, "We make full preparation for the potential factors that may affect the competition, such as drones and firecrackers."

Zou said all-around tests were conducted in accordance with the standards of the Asian Games.

> "I have spent four days with my horse, Kumara, and I am quite satisfied with our cooperation today."
>
> **Amanda Fang**, an 11-year-old rider from the United States

The equestrian competition of the 19th Asian Games Hangzhou will take place at Tonglu Equestrian Centre from Sept 26 to Oct 6. There will be a total of six gold medals offered in eventing (in which a single horse and rider compete against others in the three disciplines of dressage, cross-country and show jumping), dressage and show jumping.

It is expected that around 200 riders and more than 200 horses from different countries and regions will participate.

In recent years, Tonglu has taken a number of steps since being designated to hold the Asian Games equestrian events, including constructing the Tonglu center and establishing the equine disease-free zone, which is approved by the World Organisation for Animal Health, said Zhang Yadong, deputy director of the Zhejiang Sports Bureau, during the opening ceremony on Saturday.

In addition, six urban and rural sightseeing tour lines have been established by the local government to better use the opportunities brought by the Asian Games.

These include an ancient village tour featuring folk culture, the Fuchun Mountain tour, the Meirong Mountain and Daqi Mountain tour, the Fuchun River tour highlighting the urban night scene, the customs tour of She ethnic group and the Yaolin karst cave tour.

A rider and horse take part in the First China Hangzhou (Tonglu) International Equestrian Open on Saturday in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Cease-fire: Expert says leaders should no longer 'look and wait'

From page 1

It may shore up Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's support in the short term, but Netanyahu "also realizes the diminishing marginal utility of such futile confrontations", Iqbal said. "The contradictions inherent in settler colonialism have to be resolved for lasting peace."

Kamaruzaman Bin Yusoff, a Middle East analyst and former dean of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's Faculty of Islamic Civilization, underscored the need to hold those responsible for the tensions accountable.

"Why is it that the world leaders, either in America or in the (other Western countries), don't bother about this war (but) they are so busy about Russia and Ukraine?"

"There must be a permanent solution" to the conflict, he said, adding that leaders should no longer "look and wait" to see if "there is a war next week".

Tea cultivation

Overseas students from the Shandong University of Science and Technology pick leaves on Saturday at a tea cultivation area in Qingdao, Shandong province. Students from 11 countries, including Russia, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, learned traditional tea-making techniques and tasted the beverage at the event. HAN HONGSHUO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Smearing of HK judges slammed

US commission's report dismissed as blasphemy against spirit of rule of law

By WILLIAM XU in Hong Kong
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Government officials and political heavyweights strongly condemned a United States report and so-called "hearing" that smeared Hong Kong's judicial system and threatened to sanction Hong Kong judges.

They stressed that Hong Kong's judicial independence brooks no interference, and the malicious and despicable trick could not change the Chinese people's resolve to safeguard national security and ensure the sustained success of the "one country, two systems" principle.

The US Congressional-Executive Commission on China released a report on Thursday and also held a "hearing", during which it criticized 29 Hong Kong judges and judicial officers who have handled national security-related cases, including the city's Chief Justice Andrew Cheung Kui-nung. The commission also demanded that the US government consider imposing sanctions on the judges.

The Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council dismissed on Sunday the US report's smearing of Hong Kong's judicial system, saying the central government firmly supports the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's judiciary in performing its duty in an independent and impartial manner, and never allows US politicians to interfere in the SAR's judicial independence.

The office's spokesperson said the National Security Law for Hong Kong has helped the city restore social stability, uphold its rule of law and protect the rights and interests enjoyed by Hong Kong people and overseas investors.

However, the spokesperson said, some US politicians have tried every means to interfere with Hong Kong's law enforcement and judicial works, in order to help those who endanger national security and the stability of Hong Kong escape responsibility for their crimes and to try to contain the development of the city and the nation.

The Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong SAR said the report is another rude interference in the internal affairs of China and the Hong Kong SAR.

The US politicians' attempts to obstruct the implementation of the National Security Law for Hong Kong, disrupt the judicial order in Hong Kong and interfere with the city's independent adjudication of judges is a blatant blasphemy against the spirit of the rule of law, the liaison office said.

A spokesperson for the Commissioner's Office of the Chinese Foreign Ministry in the Hong Kong SAR said no sanctions or pressure could change the firm determination of the Chinese side to safeguard the prosperity and stability of the Hong Kong SAR and ensure the sustained success of "one country, two systems".

Foreign intimidation will only make the Chinese people even more united, and all foreign interference will only fall flat, the office said.

In a separate statement, the Hong Kong SAR government said the threat of imposing so-called "sanctions" on judges did not only expose the hypocrisy and double standard of some US politicians, who claim to uphold the rule of law but have seriously damaged it with political manipulation, but also is a serious violation of the basic principles of international law and international relations.

The Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong, the city's largest political group, said it firmly supports Hong Kong judges in continuing to perform their duties. The group also urged the Hong Kong government to take necessary measures to protect judges from external interference and safeguard the city's judicial system.

Lawmaker Stanley Ng Chau-pei, who also chairs the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions, the SAR's largest labor union, said the attempt by US politicians to interfere in Hong Kong's national security trials with threats will not affect Hong Kong people's resolve to safeguard national security, safeguard Hong Kong's prosperity and stability, and uphold the Constitution, the Basic Law and the National Security Law for Hong Kong.

Legal support drives unmanned vehicles in Shanghai

By LIN SHUJUAN in Shanghai
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Riding a self-driving taxi in central Shanghai is still futuristic, but one can already see these unmanned vehicles doing test runs in the municipality's Pudong New Area.

The robotaxis strictly follow all traffic rules and regulations — stopping at red lights, minding obstacles, braking or accelerating when necessary and making U-turns.

The Shanghai Pudong Jinqiao Intelligent Connected Vehicle Test Demonstration Zone, an open road for fully autonomous vehicles, has been a hot spot for trial runs since Pudong enacted in March a local regulation on the use of unmanned intelligent connected vehicles.

The regulation offers details of the application procedure and the responsibilities of enterprises to carry out road tests and demonstration operations of fully self-driving ICVs. It is the country's first legislation that provides legal support for driverless vehicles to test and operate on the road in a central area of a Chinese megacity.

According to Tang Wenkan, deputy director of the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Economy and Informatization, the window of competition for intelligent cars has opened.

"Legislation is essential to promote the industry to become bigger and stronger," Tang said. "Legal protection can effectively boost industry confidence and attract leading companies. With the legislation, downstream enterprises are also willing to expand their presence in Shanghai, which will further enhance Shanghai's ICV technological innovation and industrial competitiveness."

In March, 14 companies related to intelligent connected vehicles signed contracts to settle in Pudong's Jinqiao, Zhangjiang and other areas.

Many companies have applied for road tests in Jinqiao, according to Lin Yu, general manager of Shanghai Jinqiao Intelligent Connected Vehicle Development Co. "We've issued test notifications to four companies, which are now testing driverless taxis, driverless delivery, unmanned shuttle buses and automatic parking in our demonstration zone," Lin said.

Autonomous vehicle startup AutoX, which is based in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, is one of the first companies testing its robotaxis in Jinqiao.

"Pudong's recognition at the legislative level that allows ICVs to enter public roads as legal traffic participants has provided a better testing ground for product research and development," said Terry Lin, vice-president of AutoX. "Legislation support is essential for fully driverless vehicles to realize large-scale standardized implementation."

The piece of legislation, which is set to provide significant support for Shanghai to build a world-class automobile industry center, is the city's latest legislation effort to back Pudong's high level of reform and opening-up.

In June 2021, Shanghai's legislators were authorized to make laws specific to Pudong in accordance with its needs for reform and innovation following a guideline released by the State Council, China's Cabinet, to support Pudong's development as a pioneer of socialist modernization. Since then, a total of 15 laws, including the one on ICV application, have been tailored for Pudong.

"The biggest role of any legislation for Pudong New Area is to address some of the blocking points or bottlenecks in our current laws and regulations," Liu Yuqing, deputy director of the Pudong New Area People's Congress Standing Committee, told reporters in January.

"Our focus is to ensure that the institutional innovation advantages of the Pudong New Area legislation are transformed into high-quality development," Liu said.

Growth: Investor calls for 'a lot of free trade with China'

From page 1

"The number of Qualcomm's employees in China has grown by double digits almost every year since 2018," Meng said.

In addition, Qualcomm has established joint innovation centers with partners, which is an important part of the company's continuous development in China, he said.

Data from the Ministry of Commerce showed that foreign direct investment in the Chinese mainland, in terms of actual use, expanded 4.9 percent year-on-year to 408.45 billion yuan ($58.8 billion) in the first quarter of this year. Specifically, FDI in high-tech manufacturing increased 18 percent from the same period a year ago.

Samson Khaou, executive vice-president of Dassault Systemes Asia-Pacific, said the French industrial software company is highly confident about China's economic growth this year and will continue to invest more in the Chinese market, believing that China's growth will come from both domestic and global demand.

Charlie Munger, a US billionaire investor and vice-chairman of Berkshire Hathaway, said: "One thing we should do is to get along with China, and we should have a lot of free trade with China. It's in our mutual interest. … Everything that increases the tension between the two … is stupid, stupid and stupid."

The International Monetary Fund has projected that China's economy will likely expand by 5.2 percent this year, and the country is going to contribute about one-third of global growth this year, which will provide more growth opportunities for other countries.

"Technological decoupling would impose significant costs on Asian economies — about 5 percent loss in GDP. That's quite a big number. … In general, technological decoupling is very expensive for not just Asia, but for the rest of the world," said Krishna Srinivasan, director of the IMF's Asia and Pacific department.

Tu Xinquan, dean of the China Institute for WTO Studies at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said Washington's increasingly tightened restrictions will wreak havoc on international economic and trade cooperation, jeopardize global industrial and supply chain safety, and harm the interests of multinational companies around the world.

Li Xianjun, an associate researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Industrial Economics, said, "Such attempts aimed at containing the rise of China's high-tech sector will motivate Chinese enterprises to double down on independent innovation and achieve breakthroughs in key technologies."

For example, China Electronics Corp, the country's largest State-owned comprehensive electronic information enterprise group, has launched China's first open-source desktop operating system platform, openKylin, which marked a breakthrough in bolstering the development of homegrown software operating systems.

Economist Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University, said a lot of the tension between the US and China arises from the US side.

"This is the US' mistake, because some Americans think that if China is rising, the US must be losing," Sachs said. "But this is false. Economics is a win-win cooperative game."

Zhou Lanxu contributed to this story.

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CHINA

Watchdogs warn against 'circle culture' in CPC

Some hobby-based cliques turned into channels for offering, accepting bribes

By CAO YIN
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China's top anti-corruption watchdogs have reiterated opposition to cliques and political and interest groups within the Communist Party of China, calling for all Party members to be vigilant about avoiding such organizations.

The CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and National Commission of Supervision, which serve in tandem as the nation's top anti-corruption watchdogs, restated their opposition to cliques on their website on Tuesday after a former high-ranking official, accused of seriously violating Party discipline and the law, was placed under investigation.

On April 19, Chen Yiguo, former Party chief and chairman of the Hubei Changjiang Publishing and Media Group, was expelled from the CPC and dismissed from public office after it was discovered that he supported what is referred to in China as "circle culture".

According to the watchdogs, circle culture refers to people forming interest groups in the hopes of holding on to their power and influence over other members.

It noted that some cliques set up wine, mahjong or fishing circles with people who enjoy these hobbies, and then take advantage of the relationships formed to offer or accept bribes.

> "The purpose of those who create these circles is not to make friends or enjoy a hobby. Instead, what they want is to benefit from the power they can gain from the circles."
>
> CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and National Commission of Supervision

"The purpose of those who create these circles is not to make friends or enjoy a hobby. Instead, what they want is to benefit from the power they can gain from the circles," it said, adding that Party members should avoid engaging in this kind of behavior.

During the second plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection held in Beijing in January, the watchdogs stressed that no leniency would be given to those who run these groups within the Party.

A ban on the formation of cliques, or circles, within the Party can be found in an intra-Party regulation on political culture. Leaders have repeatedly emphasized the need for Party members to closely follow the regulation.

"Party organizations and Party members must oppose and prevent circle culture," the watchdogs stated on their website, noting that this kind of culture can cause serious damage to the intra-Party political environment.

It called for Party officials to lead by example and avoid cliques, adding that the senior members will be the primary targets of investigations.

Chen was one of several other former members placed under investigation for being involved in cliques.

For instance, Hu Zelong, a former senior Party official with the administration service management bureau in Tianfu New Area in Sichuan province, was investigated in May 2021. He was removed from the Party and public office six months later due to his support for circle culture and for seriously violating Party discipline and the law.

In March last year, he was sentenced to 6.5 years in prison for corruption and bribery and fined 1.2 million yuan ($173,200).

Illegal gains can be seized even after death

By CANG WEI in Nanjing
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The Jiangsu Provincial People's Procuratorate released details of the country's first case involving the confiscation of illegal gains from a senior official who died while under investigation.

The late official, Ren Runhou, was vice-governor of Shanxi province. In September 2014, he was dismissed by the Communist Party of China for serious violations of discipline and died of an illness 10 days later.

Under the appointment of the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the Jiangsu procuratorate launched an investigation. It sorted through 278 bank accounts, freezing more than 23 million yuan ($3.3 million) in deposits and 3.1 million yuan in cash. Prosecutors also seized 155 valuable items and foreign currency deposits and interviewed 160 witnesses as they searched for confirmation of the amount of money Ren had gained illegally.

In December 2016, prosecutors in Yangzhou, Jiangsu, filed an application with the court to confiscate the money and valuables according to special procedures involving unlawful gains. The rules were issued in 2012, when China amended its Criminal Procedure Law.

In July 2017, the court confiscated the gains, which included 300,000 yuan resulting from bribery, 12.65 million yuan derived from property of an unidentified source, foreign currency and 135 pieces of jewelry and other items of value.

Wan Long, director of the third procuratorial department of the Jiangsu procuratorate, described the process of the case on Thursday. Wan said that previously, the death or escape of a suspect would have led to the case being shelved, as the law did not contain provisions for confiscation under such circumstances.

However, procedures for the confiscation of unlawful gains made it clear that the procuratorate was able to submit a court application for confiscation even if the suspect did not appear in court due to being either dead or on the run, Wan said.

Li Min, a lawyer from the Nanjing office of the Tiantai Law Firm, said that even if a suspect is dead and his or her illegal gains have been inherited by relatives or converted into other property, the converted property can also be treated as an illegal gain and be confiscated.

Yu Xinshui, deputy procurator-general of the Jiangsu procuratorate, said the introduction of the procedures for the confiscation of unlawful gains will alert other potentially corrupt officials to the fact that the country has zero tolerance for corruption.

Guo Jun contributed to this story.

Drop-down rescue

Emergency rescuers rappel down near-vertical mountains during training in Zhangjiajie, a famous tourist attraction in Hunan province, on Sunday. The team provides emergency rescue services at various scenic areas, and also picks up trash thrown into deep valleys. WU YONGBING / XINHUA

Briefly

Man accused of killing 7 people captured

A man suspected of killing seven people and injuring 11 was captured by police in Lyuliang city, Shanxi province, the local government said in a release on Sunday. According to the release, a 27-year-old man surnamed Guo injured a 21-year-old woman during a dispute in Xingxian county, Lyuliang, on Saturday afternoon and killed her mother-in-law, her husband and her son. While fleeing by car, Guo hit a police officer and 13 passersby. Altogether, seven died and 11 were injured. Further investigation is underway, the release said.

Guangzhou house fire leaves 5 dead

Five people were killed in a fire in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province, early on Sunday morning. According to a statement released by the Guangzhou Fire and Rescue Brigade on Sunday, the fire broke out at 2:48 am at a home on Baogangxi Road in the city's Haizhu district. Firefighters, trucks and an ambulance were immediately sent to the scene to help rescue the victims and extinguish the blaze after being alerted by local residents. The fire was quickly put out, the statement said. Firefighters and rescue workers searched for survivors, but medical staff on the scene confirmed that all had been killed. The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

Ancient stele found in Shanxi province

A stele more than 1,000 years old has been discovered in Shanxi province, according to local authorities. The stele was found in Xingtangsi village in Hongtong county while villagers were clearing the land north of the ruins of a temple. Historical artifact experts later found that the stele was erected in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) during the reign of Emperor Wenzong in the early 9th century, and survived the rise and fall of the adjacent Zhongzhen Temple. The temple was built in 594 and was a place of worship for several centuries. Several ancient steles were made and stood as records of renovations, worship and other activities. So far, the newly discovered stele is the only one confirmed to be from the Tang Dynasty found in the county.

13,000 intl trips made on China-Laos Railway

The China-Laos Railway has handled 13,310 cross-border passenger trips since the launch of its passenger service on April 13, according to the Mohan entry-exit border checkpoint. During the period, the Chinese border town of Mohan in Yunnan province logged 7,024 inbound passenger trips and 6,286 outbound trips. "It's very convenient to travel to China by train now. More and more tourists from Laos and Thailand are planning to travel to China," said Nhanxana, a Laotian tour guide. The China-Laos Railway, a landmark cooperation project part of the Belt and Road Initiative, began operation in December 2021. The 1,035-km railway connects China's Kunming with Vientiane in Laos.

Funds to support public cultural services

China's Ministry of Finance has announced it will deliver funds to help local governments improve public cultural services. Funds of 1.02 billion yuan ($148 million) will be allocated to branches of the ministry above the county level within 30 days from May 8, according to an announcement by the ministry. The central government has budgeted a total of 14.96 billion yuan to help the creation of a local system of public cultural services this year, with the rest of the funds already having been disbursed, according to the ministry. The funds will be used in projects like the one-off subsidy of wired HD interactive digital set-top boxes and fitness facilities in some areas, the ministry said.

XINHUA—CHINA DAILY

CHINA

Public Science Day thrills enthusiasts

Crowds queue up once again to see latest in tech, meet researchers

By ZHANG ZHIHAO
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China's highest academic institution for natural sciences opened its doors to science lovers over the weekend to share the latest scientific and technological achievements, with the goal of popularizing science and allowing the public to engage with noted scientists and key research facilities.

The Chinese Academy of Sciences launched its 19th Public Science Day event on Saturday, opening 100 research institutions to the public as well as nearly 100 observatories, botanical gardens, museums, field stations and key laboratories.

Public enthusiasm was feverish since this was the first time in three years that the academy had been able to fully resume live activities on Public Science Day.

Parents and children began queuing outside the front doors of the academy's Institute of Physics early in the morning. The Institute of Automation extended opening hours several times to accommodate visitors, and tickets to tour the China Spallation Neutron Source, a major piece of scientific infrastructure that probes the internal structure of materials, sold out in hours.

"I am thrilled to be here. I like physics, and seeing real physicists in person is fun. I hope everyone will have as much fun as me," said Zhang Zipei, a 6-year-old volunteer at the Institute of Physics who was tasked with handing out event brochures and stamping souvenir seals on pamphlets.

Many young attendees said they very much wanted to visit the Institute of Physics because of its dual existence as a prestigious academic institution and quirky social media science communication sensation.

For example, in 2018 the institute painted its manholes with physics equations and cartoons to celebrate its 90th anniversary, and went viral on Chinese social media.

The theme of this year's event at the institute was "Science Predicting the Future — the Bizarre Adventure of the Middle School Syndrome Institute," which is a reference to the popular Japanese manga series *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* and another reference to an anime trope in which a character is humorously unaware of their true power.

Visitors are drawn by scientific experiments on display at the 19th Public Science Day event in Beijing on Saturday. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Children of all ages came to see the institute's scientists conduct colorful and thought-provoking physics experiments. After the show, they were able to use the instruments themselves and ask questions about their use.

The institute also featured dozens of exhibitions on China's latest achievements in artificial intelligence, autonomous underwater vehicles, lunar exploration and experiments onboard the Tiangong space station.

Cao Ying, a Beijing resident attending the event with her 3-year-old son, said that she had previously only known about these scientific achievements through the news. She added that it had been eye-opening to experience them firsthand and to talk to the scientists behind them.

"Science education should start at an early age," she said. "Seeing these scientific achievements in person makes me appreciate the hard work and ingenuity of our scientists even more."

At the Institute of Automation of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, people queued to see a bionic shark and manta ray swim as smoothly as their real counterparts. Experts said the robots could be equipped with sensors to collect data that could be crucial to environmental protection and water quality control.

Another Beijing resident who identified herself as Nana said that her son's favorite exhibits at the institute were about brain-computer interfaces.

"One exhibit allowed my son to put on a headband and use his brainwaves to wake up a virtual cat on the screen. It was really cool," she said.

Wang Bosheng, an associate researcher at the Institute of Automation who works on humanoid robots, said that sharing China's latest scientific and technological feats with the general public is necessary.

"Chinese scientists and engineers have accomplished many great things, and these achievements should not be locked away in an ivory tower," he said.

By communicating their findings to the public, Wang said that scientists also learn more about the actual needs of the people, which helps open up new areas of research and use. One example is using humanoid robots to care for the elderly.

"Effective science communication is a two-way street," Wang said. "Scientists share their findings to promote science literacy, but they can also get new ideas by interacting with the public."

7 Chinese nurses win intl honor for courage, devotion

By WANG XIAOYU
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Seven Chinese nurses have received this year's Florence Nightingale Medal, making China the country with the largest single number of recipients this year, according to the Red Cross Society of China.

A total of 37 nurses from 22 countries won the medal, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross on Friday. The honor is presented biennially to nurses who show exceptional courage and devotion to caring for people during conflict or disaster, or who demonstrate a pioneering spirit in the areas of public health or nursing education.

Among this year's honorees is Gan Xiuni, director of the nursing department of the Second Affiliated Hospital of Chongqing Medical University.

She was on the front lines caring for the victims of a marsh gas explosion in 1985 in Chongqing. She also treated patients during the severe acute respiratory syndrome outbreak in 2003, and people injured during the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, the 58-year-old worked in makeshift hospitals for the infected in three provincial-level regions for more than 130 days. During an early phase of the outbreak in Xiaogan, Hubei province, she engaged in manual labor, including moving respirators, despite suffering from severe disc herniation, earning herself the nickname "Strong Spine" from her fellow medical workers.

Xing Shaoyun, head nurse at the leprosarium at the Fifth People's Hospital of Hainan Province in Haikou, the provincial capital, received her medal for "notably transforming traditional leprosy nursing and introducing novel leprosy wound treatment in China," according to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Xing began caring for leprosy patients after graduating from nursing college in 1995. Through years of practice, she has learned to successfully apply regenerative medicine skills and moist exposed burn ointment, also known as MEBO, after the debridement of affected skin.

The new methods helped reduce the rate of ulceration among leprosy patients from 28 percent to 5 percent, and also lowered the rate of amputation, according to the hospital where Xing worked, which added that the nurse has also headed the expansion of innovative methods to leprosy patients around the country.

During a recent interview with Hinews.cn, a local media outlet in Hainan, Xing said that she plans to set up a wound care outpatient department at the hospital, and to visit more rural areas to train grassroots health workers.

Since China began recommending candidates for the award in 1983, 90 nurses have won, according to China's Red Cross.

There were 5.2 million nurses in China at the end of last year, or 3.7 nurses per 1,000 people, the National Health Commission said during a news conference held ahead of International Nurses Day, which falls on May 12 each year.

Xing Ruoqi, deputy director of the commission's medical administration department, said during a recent news conference that the number of nurses has grown by an average of 8 percent year-on-year over the past decade, with around 300,000 new nurses added each year.

She said that China will take measures to protect the rights and interests of nurses, improve their working conditions, arrange for better shifts and care for their physical and mental health.

By 2025, China aims to increase the number of nurses to 5.5 million, including 1.2 million at the grassroots level.

Study: Ice Age humans may have migrated from China to Americas, Japan

By tracing contemporary and ancient human DNA, a group of Chinese and international scientists have recently discovered evidence of Ice Age human migrations from northern coastal China to the Americas and Japan.

It is widely recognized that the ancestors of Native Americans came primarily from Siberia. But recent genetic, geological and archaeological evidence shows that there were many waves of human migration to the Americas from different parts of Eurasia.

Researchers from the Kunming Institute of Zoology under the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Kunming, Yunnan province, and from other institutions in China and Italy, collected more than 100,000 contemporary and 15,000 ancient DNA samples from Eurasia. They identified 216 contemporary and 39 ancient samples belonging to an ancestral lineage that exists in mitochondrial DNA and can be used to track kinship through female lineage.

The researchers discovered two waves of migration from northern coastal China to the Americas. The first was during the Ice Age between 26,000 and 19,500 years ago, and the second during the subsequent melting period between 19,000 and 11,500 years ago.

They also found that concurrent to the second wave, a group of ancient people sharing the same ancestral lineage migrated to Japan.

According to Li Yuchun, lead researcher at the Kunming Institute of Zoology, the study showed that northern coastal populations in ancient China contributed to the gene pool of Native Americans, in addition to sources from Siberia, Australia-Melanesia and Southeast Asia.

The study also showed that this ancestral source contributed to the Japanese gene pool, especially the indigenous Ainu people, and helps explain archaeological similarities between the Paleolithic inhabitants of China, Japan and the Americas.

The study was published in the journal Cell Reports.

XINHUA

Go with the flow

Martial arts lovers practice *qigong* in formation in a sports park in Yangzhou, Jiangsu province, on Sunday. Several hundred people participated, showing different kinds of traditional Chinese martial art forms. MENG DELONG / XINHUA

Ads accused of exploiting women's anxiety

By CUI JIA
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A Beijing market supervision and administration authority is investigating a company that allegedly produced advertisements that were disrespectful to women to market collagen peptide drinks, Chinese media reported.

Since late April, people have been posting video advertisements for Five Doctors collagen peptide drinks on social media, saying that they find them vulgar.

In the advertisements, which are mainly played on screens in elevators, women explain in a hysterical manner why they take the drinks. One says she takes it because her husband has upset her, while another says she needs it because she is getting older. The women all end up saying that they are left with no choice but to take Five Doctors.

The content of the advertisements has been widely discussed on social media. Many people say the ads play on women's anxiety about their lives, looks and age.

"I often see the advertisements in the elevators of my apartment building. They got my attention for being annoying. It is pathetic to see a product targeting female customers using advertisements that are so disrespectful to women," Huang Yuan wrote on Sina Weibo.

An employee at the Market Supervision and Administration Bureau of Chaoyang District in Beijing told Jiupai News, which is based in Wuhan, Hubei province, on Friday that it has received complaints about the Beijing Young Doctor Health Management Company — the parent company of Five Doctors — for vulgar advertising and spreading false claims about the effects of the product. The bureau has decided to investigate and has begun collecting evidence. The probe is expected to be completed within 90 days.

Zhu Wei, deputy director of the Communication Law Research Center at the China University of Political Science and Law, said that according to the Advertisement Law, content that is vulgar or discriminates along gender lines should not feature in any advertisements.

Five Doctors, which specializes in collagen peptide drinks, was founded in 2019 by five women with doctoral degrees in fields including nutrition, biology and dermatology from Peking University, according to the brand's website, which also claims that its products create visible change.

On May 6, China Women's News commented on Sina Weibo that women find the advertisements insulting because they know they are trying to make them anxious about their looks and age, which happens enough already and which they wish to end. This kind of marketing campaign may attract attention, but it doesn't work because it's disrespectful to women.

CWN also warned people that the claimed effects of collagen peptide drinks are still not clear and questioned by many experts.

Post urges greater delivery supervision

By LUO WANGSHU
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A campaign to crack down on illegal activities in the mail and express delivery sector has been carried out with the aim of promoting delivery safety, the State Post Bureau of China said recently.

The six-month campaign was carried out by 17 government departments, including the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, the Cyberspace Administration of China, the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the Ministry of Public Security and the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

In recent years, crimes involving the delivery of illegal items have occurred from time to time. A wide variety of items are either prohibited or restricted for delivery in China, including drugs, guns, dangerous chemicals, wild animals and plants and their derivatives, as well as products associated with invasive foreign species.

According to the bureau, to win the battle, risk control in mail and package delivery must be improved, and safety measures such as inspections throughout the process, the use of real names for senders and recipients and safety checks by machines should be strictly implemented.

The bureau has also asked regional postal bureaus to carry out training on the identification of prohibited, special and sensitive items to raise awareness of safety precautions and improve the ability to cope with incidents.

The bureau stated that illegal activity must be heavily punished, that inspections will be implemented online and offline, and that every step in the delivery process must be scrutinized to uncover possible crimes.

It also noted that companies in the sector must be more alert and shoulder the responsibility of improving inspections, discovering safety hazards and rectifying problems accordingly and urged companies to strictly follow safety protocols.

The campaign focused on improving safety management throughout the process of delivery. The management of personal information must be strengthened, and the mailing of dangerous chemicals, counterfeit currency, fake drugs and counterfeit goods must be stopped.

The supervision of the delivery of inbound and outbound goods and of tobacco must also be strengthened.

China has a well-established logistics and delivery industry with a high level of security and efficiency.

Many major logistics companies use advanced methodologies such as 24-hour monitoring of packages, the use of digital signatures for tracking goods and strict package-checking procedures to ensure safety.

China's parcel delivery sector has undergone rapid development over the past decade, with volumes increasing from 5.6 billion items in 2012 to 110 billion items last year, and is still expanding. As of May 4, it handled more than 40 billion parcels, demonstrating national economic recovery and reflecting growth in consumer confidence, according to the bureau.

It took 24 more days for the sector to handle the same number of parcels last year, and four more months in 2019.

CHINA

Civilian rescue teams offer help at home and abroad

The number of such groups has grown rapidly in China during the past 15 years as more people devote their time to relief efforts. **Hou Liqiang** reports.

Clockwise from top left: Members of the Ramunion, a civilian rescue team from China, carry a child pulled from earthquake rubble to a medical treatment facility in Hatay province, Turkiye, on Feb 9. Members of China's Blue Sky Rescue team participate in relief efforts in Turkiye's Malatya province on Feb 10. Personnel from the Shenzhen Rescue Volunteers Federation check their equipment and medication ahead of a rescue mission. BSR members work with local rescuers to help injured people in Malatya. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Wang Yi has mixed feelings when he recalls the time he spent in an earthquake-stricken area after a magnitude 8 temblor hit Wenchuan, Sichuan province, on May 12, 2008.

Along with many volunteers from across China, he went to the area with almost nothing but enthusiasm to save people, only to find that he could hardly do anything to help, he said.

However, there was a huge change in his emotions when he spoke about a rescue operation in Turkiye after a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck the country and neighboring Syria on Feb 6.

The equipment his team carried was more advanced than that brought by many national rescue teams from other countries, said Wang, who was in charge of 304 members of the Blue Sky Rescue team in Turkiye. The BSR is China's largest humanitarian NGO.

With the aid of high-end equipment, including a drone that can supply constant light and various types of life-detection instruments, the team helped pull eight survivors and 137 bodies from the rubble.

The changes Wang described are a microcosm of the development of China's civilian rescue teams during the past 15 years. Having started from scratch, they are now an important supplement to official emergency forces, even though many teams' operations still mainly depend on funding from their members, according to veteran rescuers and experts.

Although teams in some regions have managed to obtain support from local governments, many still need to explore how to continue their work in a sustainable way, they said.

Wang, a native of Guiyang, capital of Guizhou province, described the volunteers who headed to the quake-hit area in Wenchuan as "a herd of sheep without a shepherd".

Thanks to an introduction by one of his friends, Wang and nine other outdoor enthusiasts in Guiyang were offered seats on a cargo flight that was heading to Chengdu, Sichuan's capital, carrying emergency materials in the early hours of May 14, 2008.

In Chengdu, the team contacted volunteers from across the country via Tianya, an online discussion forum, and quickly managed to reach the affected area with the help of the local Red Cross.

Sense of helplessness

Wang quickly discovered that most of the volunteers were carrying luggage rather than rescue equipment.

Though he had brought his mountaineering rope, it turned out to be useless for earthquake rescue, he recalled. However, one volunteer had a handheld GPS device. "Back then, that was quite advanced equipment for us," Wang said.

He recalled a strong sense of helplessness after reaching Hanwang, a township in Sichuan's Deyang city. On the day the volunteers arrived, the death toll in Deyang reached several hundred. The number shot up to more than 1,000 on the second day, then over 4,000 on the third, he said.

A huge pit was dug to accommodate the bodies. "One time, the other volunteers and I stood in a daze in front of the pit. I tortured myself again and again, asking myself if I'd had the ability to rescue people would at least one or two of them have been saved?" Wang recalled.

That sense of helplessness made the volunteers determined to establish a professional rescue team.

Thanks to joint efforts in different regions, the Blue Sky Rescue group was registered in Beijing in September 2010. The NGO now has 30,000 volunteers nationwide, it said.

Wang, head of the BSR's Guizhou branch, said the first piece of equipment they bought after returning from Sichuan was a static rope, which was used for high angle rescue operations in mountains and caves. It cost about 800 yuan, so 10 volunteers split the bill.

"The Guizhou BSR has equipment worth several million yuan," said Wang, a successful entrepreneur who has bought a lot of the equipment himself. He said the equipment — including pneumatic hammers, life detection devices and diving gear — means the team can undertake different types of tasks.

The rescue gear they carried to Turkiye helped win them the trust of local rescue teams. "Though some rubble had already been searched by teams from other countries, the local teams insisted that we searched again," Wang said.

Wang Kaibo, head of the BSR in Qinghai province who also went to Turkiye, said the radar life detector they carried could detect life signs precisely. "Some local residents and rescuers even came to us after midnight to seek help," he said, adding that the team's equipment has recently been greatly upgraded.

A BSR member is reunited with his family on Feb 18, when he returned from a rescue mission after an earthquake in Turkiye. ZHAO QIRUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

When the Qinghai BSR went to Yushu (in Qinghai) after it was hit by a magnitude 7.8 earthquake in April 2015, many members joked that they only had their courage and hands, he recalled, indicating the lack of advanced equipment back then.

Many groups

The BSR was just one of 15 Chinese civilian rescue teams that joined the rescue operations in Turkiye. By 9 am on Feb 10, they had dispatched a total of 288 rescuers, according to the Ministry of Emergency Management. There was also an 82-member official Chinese team in Turkiye.

Like many other BSR members, Wang Yi and Wang Kaibo are veteran rescuers, as they have not only regularly undertaken training organized by the NGO, but have also taken part in many major rescue operations overseas since 2008.

For example, they were among 83 BSR members who went to Nepal after a magnitude 7.8 earthquake in April 2015. At least nine other Chinese civilian rescue teams also dispatched members to the country.

Yang Yanwu, secretary-general of the earthquake emergency rescue committee at the China Association for Disaster Prevention, said the Nepal earthquake marked the first large-scale participation of Chinese civilian rescuers in a disaster abroad.

"Since then, they have joined almost all major international disaster rescue operations," he said, adding that such organizations really started to play a role in China after the 2015 Yushu earthquake.

Yang noted the rapid development in the number of civilian rescuers in China and their rescue capabilities. By the end of last year, 4,011 civilian rescue teams had registered with his committee, he said, adding that the total number of members is estimated at 600,000 to 640,000.

Of those teams, about 50 have equipment worth more than 3 million yuan ($432,000). At least 10 are fully qualified to undertake international rescue operations in terms of their equipment, rescue skills, understanding of international rules and linguistic competence, he said, noting that only about 300 of the teams have permanent employees.

Civilian rescue teams operate effectively either because they have wealthy leaders with a lot of free time, great passion and competence, or because their leaders are good at obtaining support, he said.

However, the number of teams that operate efficiently is not very high, he said, adding that some members have even sold their houses to support their rescue work.

Last year, local authorities found that more than 130 of the civilian rescue teams registered with them had irregular operations, he said, adding that the actual number could be even higher.

For example, some were established by local volunteers who participated in rescue operations during the devastating flood in Zhengzhou, capital of Henan province, in July 2021. They quickly ceased operations because no further disasters happened in the area, Yang said.

He added that despite the rapid development in the past 15 years, China's civilian rescue teams are faced with challenges to their long-term development.

Disaster prevention

Based on the development experiences of foreign civilian rescue teams, Yang said they should shift their focus to disaster prevention and mitigation.

"They should mainly work in their home areas and devote themselves to their local communities. This would be more cost-effective for them as they wouldn't have to travel long distances," he said.

Disaster prevention and mitigation services are in high demand at the grassroots level, and both governments and enterprises need to hire such services. The shift in focus would conform to the actual conditions for their long-term development, he said.

Some rescue teams have already managed to strike a balance between working for the public good and obtaining funds to maintain their operations.

The Shenzhen Rescue Volunteers Federation in Guangdong province is one of them. With over 2,000 volunteers and 700 uniformed rescuers — who have all undergone training and passed relevant tests — the group has mastered rescue techniques.

The team, which was officially established in 2008, has squads for mountain, urban, air and water rescue, medical services and emergency communications, said Shi Xin, the federation's head, adding that it has 11 full-time employees.

It takes roughly 2 million yuan a year to support the operations of such a team, said Shi, who is employed by a local transportation company.

Thanks to government procurement of services since 2015, the federation is not only able to maintain its operations, but it can also buy new equipment and provide regular training sessions for members.

For example, it offers training to local police and fire brigades in mobile communications, search techniques and water rescue, he said. It is also engaged in the management of emergency shelters and safety education in communities.

The federation is also supported by a number of foundations. With the support of the One Foundation, a public welfare foundation in Shenzhen, 22 of its members took part in the rescue operations in Turkiye in February.

The federation also joined the rescue operations for the 2015 Nepal earthquake, the 2018 Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia, and the collapse of a dam in Laos the same year.

"I think we do well. We do everything to the best of our abilities," Shi said.

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Volunteer juggles job with humanitarian activities

By HOU LIQIANG

Like many Chinese people, Yu Haixin from Shenzhen, Guangdong province, found herself restless after a magnitude 8 earthquake hit Wenchuan, Sichuan province, on May 12, 2008.

As she watched the media reports, she noticed that many of the soldiers transporting disaster-relief materials to mountain-encompassed areas were wearing simple rubber-soled shoes, so it occurred to her that she should go to Sichuan and offer assistance.

"As an outdoor enthusiast, I have good, high-topped hiking boots. So, instead of using them to hike, why not go to transport relief materials or help in some other way?" she asked herself.

Back then, Yu never imagined that she would become a civilian rescuer. However, the 46-year-old has now devoted herself to voluntary rescue missions for 15 years, making full use of any time she can spare from her work as a lawyer.

Yu was just one of about 100 members of a mountaineering club in Shenzhen who traveled to Wenchuan. In fact, so many members wanted to go that they had to sign up and then leave in batches, she said.

It was June by the time Yu's turn came. By then, sufficient disaster-relief materials had been transported to Zundao, the township in which she was based, but some remote parts of the area had yet to receive sufficient supplies.

While helping to transport supplies to isolated locations by bicycle, Yu and her colleagues found that many children were playing in the rubble because they had no schools to attend.

Even though there were no human bodies under the rubble, some dead animals were buried, posing a high risk of disease, she said.

The volunteers proposed organizing summer camps for children in the township's 10 villages. The suggestion was warmly welcomed by village committees and parents.

They introduced a range of programs in different villages, including singing, outdoor fitness training and Chinese and English courses, Yu said.

As the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games were approaching, Yu designed related classes. In addition to teaching the children to recognize logos and understand the rules for various events, she discussed China's performance in the events and Chinese athletes who had previously won medals.

Yu visited the quake-hit area twice, staying for two weeks on her first trip and about a month on her second.

Back in Shenzhen, she couldn't stop devoting herself to rescue operations in the city and farther afield.

Her mountaineering club founded a mountain rescue team after the Wenchuan earthquake, which was registered as the Shenzhen Rescue Volunteers Federation in late 2013.

In the first few years, when she wasn't overburdened with work, Yu spent about one-third of her time with the team, taking part in rescue operations, along with team building and training exercises.

For example, she participated in rescue operations after the magnitude 6.5 earthquake in Ludian, Yunnan province, in 2014, and worked on the front lines after devastating floods hit Hebei province in 2016 and Henan province in 2021.

She is now a partner in a law firm, so she finds it increasingly difficult to maintain a balance between taking part in rescue operations and working in the office.

During the 10 days she spent in Henan, for example, she had to spend at least 30 minutes every day doing legal work after wrapping up her rescue efforts at 2 or 3 am.

Yu Haixin (center) is photographed with students at a summer camp she helped organize in Zundao township after the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

What is gratifying for Yu, who is single, is that her mother is very supportive of her rescue work.

"She knows I am helping other people. Every time I return from a disaster-relief operation and share my experiences with her, she is very happy," she said.

After a devastating temblor hit Turkiye and Syria in February, Yu was just as restless as she had been after the Wenchuan quake. This time, though, she was too busy at work to go and offer help.

However, when discussing participation in relief work after a major disaster, she said, "As long as I have time, I will go".

CHINA

CHARM, CHONGQING-STYLE

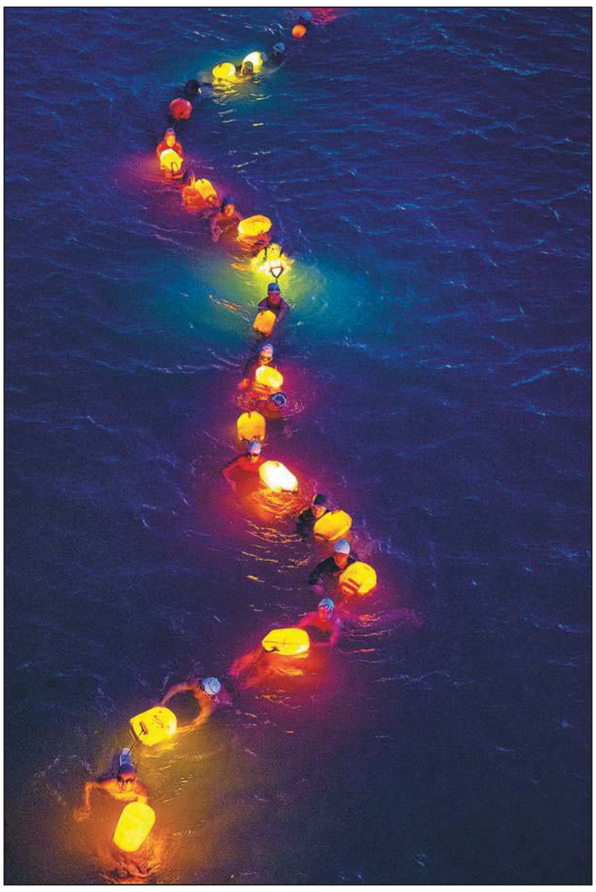
Southwestern metropolis has emerged as a hot tourist destination in recent years

By ZHAO DANDAN
For China Daily

Sometimes known as the "Mountain City", Chongqing, a southwestern metropolis of 30 million people, has become a major tourist destination not only for its historical and cultural attractions and spicy hotpot, which can be found everywhere, but also for its distinctive urban landscape.

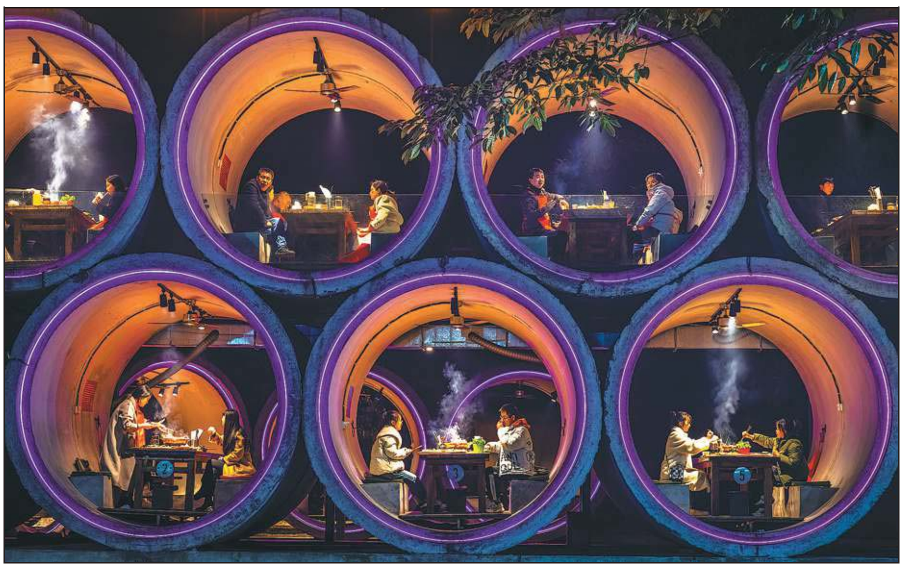
Lit by thousands of colorful lights, the city of skyscrapers built on rolling hills through which the Yangtze and Jialing rivers cut a swathe comes to spectacular life at night, drawing thousands of visitors to its landmarks to enjoy Chongqing's views, its famous spicy food and sizzling nightlife.

Right: People gather around the People's Liberation Monument, a landmark in downtown Chongqing, to wait for the coming of New Year at about 11:30 pm on Dec 31. PHOTOS BY LIU SONG / FOR CHINA DAILY



From left: People enjoy the cool air and night view on a dock on the Jialing River in Chongqing on July 29, 2019. A singer performs at an open-air bar in a riverside park in Jiangbei district on April 25.

From left: Winter swimming enthusiasts take a dip on the night of Jan 9, 2022, in the Yangtze River in Chongqing to welcome the coming Beijing Winter Olympic Games. A couple take a wedding photo on the bank of the Jialing River on March 11, 2019. Chongqing residents visit stone sculptures at Yabadong Riverside Park on the banks of the Yangtze River, on Jan 31.



From left: People enjoy the night view of the Hongyadong scenic area on the shores of the Jialing River, on May 4. People have hotpot at a restaurant famous for its dining spaces housed in concrete pipes in Chongqing on Feb 4.

COMMENT

Editorials

Washington shows it can talk the talk, but it also needs to really walk the walk

There is no doubt about the importance of the higher-level engagement between Beijing and Washington following US Ambassador Nicolas Burns' meetings with Chinese foreign and commerce ministers on May 8 and May 11, respectively.

Previously unannounced, the meeting between Wang Yi, director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, and US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan in Vienna on Wednesday and Thursday is a further inspiring sign of the shared desire to continue what both sides clearly found to be constructive communication.

Just as the Vienna talks indicated, rather than the normalization of ties, which is obviously out of the question for the foreseeable future, the outstanding priority now is managing relations to avoid a crisis.

It was therefore welcome that the meeting ended on a relatively upbeat note. A point reinforced by the statement the Chinese Foreign Ministry released after the meeting, in which it said that the meeting is expected to serve stopping the downward spiral in bilateral ties and starting to stabilize them.

China-US relations have experienced such turbulence in the past few years that any rhetoric about a return to the good old days is wishful thinking. What matters now is to make sure simmering tensions do not get out of control and cause unintended consequences. Wang's reiteration of the significance of the Taiwan question as a core Chinese national interest highlighted Beijing's concern that Washington's reckless playing of the "Taiwan card" makes the Taiwan question a flashpoint with explosive potential.

Given Washington's past practice, Beijing will watch what the Joe Biden administration does, rather than just listen to what it says.

Beijing has been particularly annoyed by the latter's repeated calls for communication even while taking actions intended to suppress China's development.

Nonetheless, the meeting indicates that even though China-US relations are being dragged off track by the political strife between the Democrats and Republicans in the US, both sides can still maintain strategic communication and are working hard to erect the "guardrails" that have been such a prominent part of the rhetoric between them.

But to keep things on a steady course, tangible moves are needed on Washington's part to demonstrate that it is sincere when it says it is willing to cooperate.

To that effect, Wang reportedly made an explicit request: That Washington removes its "unreasonable restrictions on and interferences with bilateral people-to-people exchanges and work with Beijing to broaden channels for bilateral communication".

With the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel lessening, the people of the two countries need to re-establish connectivity. This is extremely important so the two sides have realistic perceptions of each other.

The ball, therefore, seems to be in the US' court.

High hopes for five-nation peace shuttling

From Monday, Special Representative of the Chinese Government on Eurasian Affairs Li Hui is paying visits to Ukraine, Poland, France, Germany and Russia for communication aimed at promoting a political settlement to the Ukraine crisis.

Since the start of the crisis, China has adopted a principled position calling for joint efforts to promote an end to the conflict. As the crisis has dragged on and escalated, and the spillover effects have worsened, a growing number of countries have acknowledged the road map to peace that China proposed in its position paper.

The 12 points set out in the paper take into account the legitimate concerns of all parties and look beyond a cessation of the current hostilities to the broader issues of reducing strategic risks and mitigating the spillover effects that have been caused by the conflict. As a feasible foundation on which to build a consensus, it has received extensive understanding and recognition from the international community.

Through his coordination, Li will hope to provide momentum for the resumption of peace talks between Ukraine and Russia and seek to foster agreement on a balanced, effective and sustainable security architecture for Europe.

Ukraine and Russia are the two belligerents and any end to the crisis necessitates dialogue between them to de-escalate the situation and ultimately reach a cease-fire and establish the conditions in which peace talks can have a chance to bear fruit.

Poland, France and Germany are key stakeholders in realizing the broadest common understanding in Europe of any peace agreement.

It is notable, that the United States is not among Li's destinations. Although US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that "We're open to any country engaging in responsible efforts to try to advance peace", the US has not yet demonstrated its willingness to create the space necessary for the compromises that could bring an end to the conflict.

Having played Europe against Russia with the aim of permanently debilitating it, scared several European nations into joining NATO and made a profit of $100 million per ship by selling liquefied natural gas to Europe with Russia's gas supply cut, the US has perhaps been the only beneficiary from the bloodshed in Europe. And it has certainly been the biggest. As such it is questionable whether it is "open" to any efforts to try to advance peace, as Blinken claimed.

Regardless, China will continue to play a constructive role by making efforts to broker peace talks. It has expressed its hopes that the international community will extend its support to Li's efforts by not making any moves that exacerbate tensions and protract the fighting.

It is to be hoped that the US will honor Blinken's words by heeding that call.

US aims to ramp up its economic coercion

Although US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen had called for "coordinated action" by G7 nations against so-called "economic coercion" from China ahead of the G7 finance ministers' meeting that concluded on Saturday, the communique that was issued didn't make any specific mention of the topic.

Yet on Friday, one week before the three-day G7 Summit opens in Hiroshima, Japan, "a US official familiar with the discussions" told the Reuters that the leaders of the group will issue a statement including "a section specific to China" with a list of concerns that include "economic coercion and other behavior" that violate the rules-based order.

Such agenda-setting in advance is a customary tactic employed by Washington to hijack the discussions of the developed economies, and the extent to which the United States can manipulate such gatherings shows how brazenly it imposes itself on its allies.

By prompting its allies to join it in accusing China of "economic coercion", a complaint it has customized for China, Washington is trying to justify its future interventions in these countries' economic and trade relations with China, and even empower itself with the right to punish China on behalf of its allies.

The Countering Economic Coercion Act of 2023 its lawmakers introduced to Congress in February, which is yet to be passed by the Senate, sheds light on the scheme. It aims to "authorize the President to take certain actions to assist foreign trading partners affected by economic coercion and penalize foreign adversaries".

After exhausting the means to coerce China via its own economic and trade exchanges with China, the US is now eyeing those between its allies and China as a way of bolstering the power of its blows.

Both the bill itself and the preset agenda for the G7 Summit serve to show that it is the US that is resorting to "economic coercion" to achieve "strategic political objectives or influence sovereign political actions" through "actions, practices, or threats" that are undertaken to "unreasonably restrain, obstruct, or manipulate trade, foreign aid, investment, or commerce with the intent to cause economic harm", as the bill unintentionally clarifies.

If any country is cause for concern because of its economic coercion, it is the US. It has been overstretching the concept of national security, abusing exports control and taking discriminatory and unfair measures against foreign companies of different countries. Not even G7 members have been spared from US economic coercion and bullying.

If the G7 Summit is to discuss a response to economic coercion, it should first discuss its response to that of the US.

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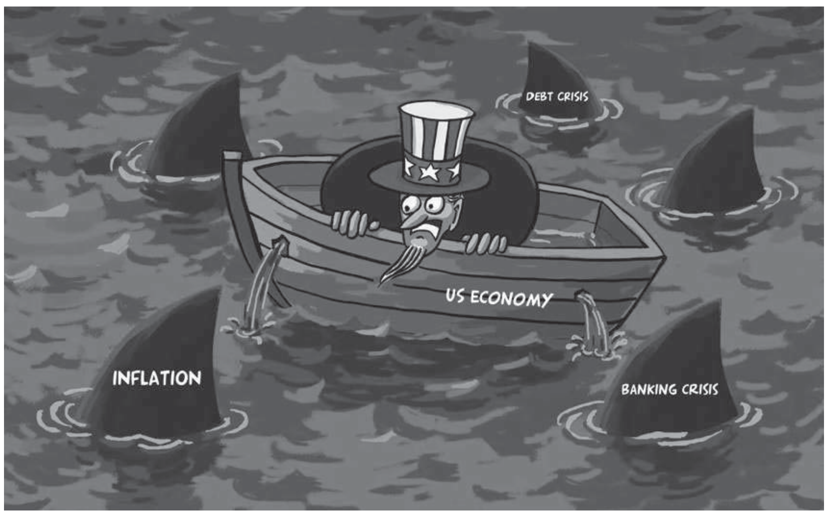

Opinion Line

Hegemon's hand behind Syria's humanitarian crisis

Syria's return to the big family of the Arab League after 12 years is an important step for Arab countries to strengthen their unity and regional stability. The international community believes that this is another milestone in the Middle East reconciliation process following the resumption of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. It is conducive to promoting peace and stability in the Middle East, accelerating development and revitalization of the Arab world and serving the long-term interests of Arab countries.

But while that is regarded as good news by the majority of the world it has triggered a different reaction from the United States. It declared its opposition to Syria's return to the Arab League last week, and announced it was extending its unilateral sanctions against the country for another year. Some in Washington have declared that bringing Syria back into the Arab League is "a serious strategic mistake" and that the US should not normalize relations with Syria and it should urge its allies to follow suit. These moves expose the US' double standard on human rights.

The Syrian crisis has dragged on for 12 years, creating a humanitarian crisis. According to figures released by the United Nations, the Syrian crisis has cost at least 350,000 lives, displaced more than 12 million people and left 14 million civilians in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. And 90 percent of the Syrian population now live in poverty, and two-thirds of the population depends on humanitarian assistance for their livelihoods.

The US bears unshirkable responsibility for the chaos in Syria. It has long imposed illegal unilateral sanctions on Syria, aggravating the humanitarian disaster in the country. The illegal unilateral sanctions by the US have greatly weakened Syria's ability to cope with disasters. In February, a powerful earthquake struck northwestern Syria, causing a large number of casualties. Under the pressure of international public opinion, the US temporarily lifted some sanctions against Syria only after the 72-hour golden relief period passed.

Now, with Syria readmitted to the Arab League and Arab countries agreeing to help Syria out of the crisis, the US insists on extending the illegal unilateral sanctions against Syria, which fully demonstrates that the US puts its hegemony above human rights.

The future of Syria must be kept in the hands of the Syrian people. The US should put aside its geopolitical calculations and help the country end the humanitarian crisis at an early date.

— PEOPLE'S DAILY

AI singers make copyright law revision urgent

Virtual singers created using artificial intelligence technologies can simulate famous singers in a very accurate way, using their styles and voices to sing any song the users want them to perform.

Yet such AI performers bring their own set of legal problems. For example, whether the behaviors of the platforms profiting from the services constitute infringements on the intellectual property rights of the original singers, lyricists and composers, as well as the original performers' image rights.

And whether the AI platform companies are entitled to use, for commercial purposes, the singers' personal vocal and timbre models and singing styles, which are unique to each singer and defining features of them?

Before these questions are properly resolved, there is already software on the AI platforms that enables users to choose the voices and singing styles of many star singers as well as their images with which the users can "stage" a concert in cyberspace in which the AI singers they create can perform songs at their requests.

On April 11, the Cyberspace Administration of China released the draft Administrative Measures for Generative AI Services to solicit public opinion. This is undoubtedly a meaningful start for promoting the healthy development and standardized application of the generative AI technologies.

In the draft regulations the legal basis clearly listed is the Network Security Law, Data Security Law and Personal Information Protection Law. After the draft regulations are finalized and implemented, they will help better define the rights and interests, as well as liabilities and obligations, of the AI platform companies and the original intellectual property rights owners of the songs, pictures, films, literature works and other intellectual products from which the AI companies can seek profits through "re-creation".

— BEIJING NEWS

What They Say

Bid to label China 'developed country' defies truth

Editor's note: *The PRC Is Not a Developing Country Act was passed in the US House of Representatives not long ago, which "requires the Department of State to take actions to stop China from being classified as a developing country by international organizations". The US Congress introduced a resolution recently that opposes China's status as a developing country in the World Trade Organization. The following are excerpts of Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin's response to a question on that at a regular news conference in Beijing on Friday:*

That China is the world's largest developing country is a fact that is recognized by the world. The "developed country" label the United States wants to put on China will not stick.

China's per capita gross domestic product last year was $12,741, one-sixth that of the United States and one-fifth that of the other advanced economies. China's gross national income ranked 68th in the world and it ranked 79th on the Human Development Index in 2021.

China's status as a developing country is recognized by the World Trade Organization and international agreements such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and is accepted by the vast majority of the members of the international community.

Moreover, China does not use that status as a shield to avoid its international obligations or as a stepping stone to special privileges. Instead, the country has been contributing tremendously to world peace and development.

China was the first country to realize the Millennium Development Goals and it has accounted for more than 70 percent of the global poverty reduction. China is now the second largest contributor to the United Nations' regular budget and peacekeeping assessments. In the WTO, the special and differential treatment provisions for China provide far less favorable support than the average level of support enjoyed by developing countries.

The US has come up with various false narratives in a bid to deny China's developing country status. In doing so it aims to suppress China's development and disrupt and stall the momentum of the collective rise of developing countries. But the US does not get to decide whether China is a developing country.

China will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. And it will continue to work for the greater representation and say of developing countries in the international governance system and defend the legitimate and lawful rights and interests of developing countries.

VIEWS

China and the World Roundtable | China-US Relations

Editor's note: *As the world's two largest economies, China and the US need to strengthen communication and cooperation, desist from interfering in each other's domestic affairs and, at the same time, shoulder their respective international responsibilities, and work together to advance world peace and development. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.*

Tom Watkins

The 'seven-C' guardrail preventing Sino-US conflict

The road before us is dangerous with diplomatic dark clouds hanging overhead. So China and the United States should keep aside their rivalry and recalibrate their relationship in the interests of all to bring peace and prosperity to the world. The two sides also need to jointly build "guardrails" to manage their growing strategic competition.

The current tension between the two largest economies is palpable and is shaking the world. There is fear that Sino-US relations are heading toward conflict or, God forbid, a devastating war.

The rivalry between the two countries has grown as have China's economy, national strength and scientific and technological capabilities, making it exceedingly difficult for the West to simply thump its chest and expect China to fall in line. We need leaders on both sides of the Pacific to artfully manage this delicate relationship in order to avoid a head-on collision that would be catastrophic for all.

I have been a participant-observer of China's rise since my youth in the 1960s and while crisscrossing China since 1989. I've kept my eyes wide open in my effort to understand and explain to Western audiences all I have learned and experienced while striving to build cultural, educational and economic bridges between our two nations. Clearly, our two countries see the world from different perspectives. Yet both need to take a broader view of the world if we wish to pass down peace and prosperity to our children and grandchildren.

Of late, the two countries' decisions have exacerbated tensions and mistrust, instead of lessening them, which does not bode well for either China, or the US or the rest of the world.

It is imperative that we find ways to maintain open dialogue, focusing on the "seven Cs" — maintaining communication, collaboration, cooperation, coordination and competition while avoiding confrontation and conflict.

Since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, the relationship between China and the US has experienced periods of both tension and cooperation over many issues including trade, climate change, and the Taiwan question. Yet the two sides have

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sensibly navigated forward.

Today, the US and Chinese economies are as intertwined as a bowl of noodles. The two sides are also major global powers. All major global issues intersect at the corner of Beijing and Washington. And how our leaders resolve those issues will shape the future world.

Only by understanding each other can the US and China avoid a fate worse than any 20th century conflict. Are a rising power and an established power always destined to engage in a conflict, as the "Thucydides' trap" theory claims? The world wants a resounding "no" as the answer.

I believe that the best strategy for the US to thrive despite China's rise is simply to not stand in opposition to China and, instead, aggressively invest in the US and US citizens.

MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

China's transformation into the world's second-largest economy is nothing short of remarkable. China should take a bow for its accomplishments, which have benefited so many people. For instance, China has lifted more than 800 million people out of extreme poverty, accounting for more than 75 percent of global poverty reduction, a feat the world has never seen before. A stable, economically advancing China benefits all.

It is easy at times like these to pile on the grievances we have against each other. But we need to stop playing a game of see-saw, in which one side must go down for the other to go up. An armed conflict would pull both countries as well as the rest of the world down to their knees.

Our two nations need to reset their relations. US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping could surprise the world by announcing another "Nixon goes to China" moment by jointly proposing a Nobel Peace Prize-worthy idea such as a "G2 Action Plan on Global Health", a joint pledge for a shared vision and common agenda with specific, measurable goals to make the planet a better place. By working together to help end the Russia-Ukraine conflict. By joining hands to fight climate change, prevent pandemics and nuclear proliferation, and alleviate global hunger. And be the leaders the world needs.

Zero-sum games can only lead to mutual destruction. The relationship between our two nations is the foundation for world peace, a common ground that allows diplomatic solutions to work around issues that divide us.

We need a path that allows for mutual strategic interests, sovereignty over our respective internal affairs and a genuine design to improve the lives of all. The consequences of not finding a smooth way forward are too dire to contemplate. What kind of future are we heading toward if our leaders choose conflict over peace?

We need to work together to solve global existential threats and chip away at vexing problems to prevent a single spark from igniting a raging fire.

Let peace and prosperity prevail.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Victor Zhikai Gao

To live and let live is best way forward

With the Joe Biden administration saying that "competition, cooperation and confrontation" define US-China relations, many people in the US have taken for granted that China is a competitor of the United States.

Some in the US even say China is an "existential threat" to the US and China and the US are "destined for war". Before more people fall into the administration's trap, we need to ask a crucial question: Does China want to compete with the US?

Although the US and China are the world's two largest economies and their economies are intertwined, the two are completely different countries. While China is a country with more than 5,000 years of uninterrupted civilization, the United States is a young, dynamic superpower.

If China competes with the US in terms of, or threatens the US with, its political system, ideology, values and ways of doing things, most likely there will be no peace in the world. But since the fact is otherwise, the US is either misguided or has chosen to misinterpret the real goals of China. In both cases, the consequences could be dire.

A better way to define China-US relations is to think of Yao Ming and Elon Musk, one an outstanding basketball player, the other one of the most successful businessmen. It is ridiculous to suggest Yao would seek to compete with Musk.

There is nothing Yao and Musk can compete for. Yao can never achieve success in business like Musk, while Musk can never be as good a basketball player as Yao. So they would do better to cheer each other and marvel at each other's success in their respective fields.

Similarly, China and the US should not compete with each other in their respective fields of expertise. Instead, they should complement each other where they can for mutual benefit.

Some people in the US may take China's rapid economic development since the launch of reform and opening-up as a sign of China competing with the US. If Americans believe the Chinese economy should not overtake the US economy, they should come up with a valid legal and moral justification for their belief.

Washington is probably confused. If the US thinks that after the Chinese economy overtakes the US economy, China will impose its ideology, political system and way of life on the US, it is simply wrong. China believes that its continuous development is inevitable and no country can stop it — and any attempt to do so and thus deprive 1.4 billion Chinese people of their right would be the biggest crime against humanity.

China wants to convince every country in the world, especially the US, that neither in the past when China was a much smaller economy did it try to impose its development model or political system on another country nor will it do so now when it is the second-largest economy or in the future when it overtakes the US as an economy (Musk has predicted that

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by the middle of this century, China's economy could be double the size of the US). Rather, China will treat all countries as equals, including and especially the US.

For China and the US, the best way forward is to live and let live.

The US administration has restricted the exports of semiconductor chips to Beijing in their bid to deny it access to advanced chips not only from the US but also from Japan, the Republic of Korea and the Taiwan island. There are at least two basic defects in the US' chip war strategy.

First, the strategy runs foul of the basic business imperative of dealing with your largest customer with care and long-term vision, and China has been the largest customer of the US semiconductor sector for many years. By prohibiting chip manufacturers from selling their products to their largest customer, the US may actually cause the decline of its chip-manufacturing sector, even destroy it. Paradoxically, the US chip war may prompt China to achieve self-sufficiency in chips.

Therefore, by weaponizing semiconductors in a Cold War-style, the US may either achieve a pyrrhic victory or, more likely, suffer a devastating defeat.

Washington has also been using the Taiwan question to raise tensions across the Taiwan Strait and the Asia-Pacific region. However, a careful reading of the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation, which make clear the unconditional surrender of fascist Japan in World War II, will tell you that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China. The United Nations, too, recognizes this fact.

No one in his or her right frame of mind would try to change the US' acknowledgement since 1979 that there is only one China and Taiwan is part of China, and the government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legitimate representative of China. Given the legitimacy of the one-China principle, China has made it amply clear that the US has no right to interfere in the Taiwan question, because it's China's internal matter.

It's time the US realized that Taiwan can never be an independent state because the separatists on the island will never be allowed to secede the island from the motherland.

Rather than being misguided by the China and US "destined for war" fallacy and creating trouble in the region, the US should devote time to putting Sino-US ties back on the right track, and restoring peace and promoting development across the world, so the two countries can coexist peacefully.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Yuan Zheng

Peaceful coexistence path to better future

Sino-US relations have deteriorated to such an extent in recent years that the prospect of any improvement in the short term appears dim. The Joe Biden administration has been strengthening the United States' alliances and promoting so-called value-oriented diplomacy, leading some to believe Washington and Beijing are moving toward a head-on collision.

Unquestionably, a direct conflict between China and the US will have catastrophic consequences for the world, given that both are nuclear powers and leaders in artificial intelligence. And the increasing use of AI in military technology could make warfare even more brutal and destructive.

A Sino-US conflict would be not only devastating for the two countries but also for the rest of the world, leaving the regional and global economies in tatters.

China's rise is perhaps the most significant development in the past half a century, and it is, among other things, changing the global power structure. It is crucial to understand and appropriately respond to the rise of a major power, in order to maintain world peace and development.

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Yet the "might makes right" mentality has been dominant in the West for the past 500 years, and the US probably views China's rise with the same mindset. To maintain its global hegemony, the US is resorting to all possible means, from forming new and strengthening existing alliances to forcing others to take sides in its disputes with countries it considers rivals. The fact is, the US cannot accept the reality of China's rise, as it fears that a stronger China will challenge its global hegemony. No wonder it has abandoned its policy of engaging with China and is doing everything in its power to check China's rise.

The current US policy toward China is fraught with contradictions. While it says it does not want to trigger a Cold War or conflict with China and, instead, seeks to build a "shield" of competition between the two sides, its actions suggest otherwise. The US is using every possible means to check China's rise including hurting China's core interests and interfering in China's internal affairs while seeking cooperation with China on certain issues. Also, the US is imposing sanctions on Chinese entities and, at the same time, asking China to further open up its market to American companies.

The Sino-US relations have reached a critical juncture. Cooperation between the two sides can become a cornerstone of global stability and help maintain global peace. With economic globalization deepening and all countries urging them to work together for the benefit of all, China and the US should forge a new path, a path that is devoid of confrontation, a path of mutually beneficial relationship.

As the world's two largest economies and permanent UN Security Council members, the US and China should build a healthy, stable relationship, so as to benefit people in both countries and meet the expectations of the international community.

The two major powers have to find the right path to peaceful coexistence in the new era, by respecting each other's social systems and development paths, respecting each other's core interests and right to development, treating each other as equals, managing their differences, and seeking common ground while shelving differences.

Not engaging in conflict or confrontation should be the bottom line for both sides. The US has said the two sides can "coexist", which is good. Better still, the two sides' aim should be "peaceful coexistence".

Also, since the interests of China and the US are intertwined, cooperation will benefit the two sides while confrontation will harm both. Since the world is big enough for both the US and China to thrive, the two sides would do better to adhere to the policy of mutual benefit, and not play zero-sum games.

Competition between China and the US is inevitable, but it should not be malicious. Neither side should challenge the core interests of the other; rather, they should engage in fair competition, such as a competition to determine which side contributes more to the world.

To avoid conflict and create the right global environment for peaceful coexistence, efforts should be made on four fronts. First, the two countries need to strengthen communication at all levels and in all fields to enhance mutual trust and prevent strategic misjudgments. They should also make good use of existing channels and mechanisms to hold dialogue, promote cooperation and solve urgent problems, while facilitating social exchanges.

Second, they should manage their differences in a constructive way to prevent relations from derailing.

Third, there is also a need for the US and China to deepen cooperation on issues of common interest. The two countries have common interests in fields such as the economy, energy, military, law enforcement, education, the internet and environmental protection. Hence, they should strengthen cooperation in these fields on the basis of equality and mutual benefit.

The nature of Sino-US economic relations is mutually beneficial, so Washington should not politicize bilateral economic issues and stop using the pretext of national security to weaken Chinese companies.

And fourth, the two sides should strengthen coordination and cooperation on major international and regional issues, including providing more public goods for the world, helping maintain a fair and reasonable world order, jointly promoting peace and global development, while joining hands to fight climate change, boosting the global economy, safeguarding public health, bolstering the non-proliferation and arms control regimes, cracking down on drug trafficking and transnational crime, and ensuring global food security.

In short, guiding Sino-US relations toward positive development is necessary for the benefit of both sides as well as the rest of the world. As two major global powers, China and the US have the obligation to lead the world toward a path that is conducive to peace and development.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Return of cultural relics a global trend

Many lost artworks repatriated, a move backed by intl collaboration

By **ZHAO RUINAN**
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The recent trend of repatriating artifacts was welcomed worldwide because the treasures can provide people with valuable insights into their country's history and help preserve a country's heritage, experts said.

On Friday, India announced it was set to embark on a major diplomatic campaign to retrieve thousands of artifacts, including one of the largest cut diamonds in the world, which had been removed from the country by Britain during the colonial period, The Telegraph reported.

The push to reclaim the treasures lost back in the days of the British Empire is said to "come from the top" echelons of Indian officials. The campaign is also reportedly on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's priority list, with one Telegraph source describing the initiative as "reckoning with the past".

"Artifacts are best displayed and valued in the nation or culture that created it, where they can fully present their historical and cultural significance and promote equal communication and mutual prosperity," said Zhang Zikang, director of the Central Academy of Fine Arts Museum in Beijing.

In December, when 22 Benin Bronzes looted more than a century ago were handed back to Nigeria in a ceremony in the capital Abuja, the event drew worldwide attention.

The Benin Bronzes are sculptures and plaques looted from the ancient Kingdom of Benin — now southern Nigeria, not the modern nation of Benin — by British soldiers in 1897. After being shipped to the United Kingdom in the late 19th century, many were auctioned off in London and some were bought by German collectors.

The handover was part of a pioneering model for large-scale restitution in Western countries in recent years.

Last year Germany gave back hundreds of objects to Nigeria, France handed 26 artifacts back to Benin, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York cut a deal to transfer ownership of dozens of sculptures to Greece.

The spark was struck in France. In November 2017 France's President Emmanuel Macron made a speech before an audience of students and faculty at the University of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso.

Claiming to speak in the name of youth, he said: "I cannot accept that a large share of several African countries' cultural heritage be kept in France. ... Within five years I want the conditions to exist for temporary or permanent returns of African heritage of Africa."

Huo Zhengxin, a professor in the School of International Law at China University of Political Science and Law in Beijing, said Macron's statement had triggered a trend in Europe and the US of returning cultural artifacts.

For Duncan Dornan, head of Glasgow Life Museums and Collections in Scotland, the restitution trend represents a change of social and cultural ideas across Europe.

In April last year Glasgow announced it would return 17 Benin Bronze artifacts from the city's museum collections to Nigeria.

"There had been repatriation proposals by curators over the past decades, but they received little support," Dornan told China Newsweek. "In the past two years public opinion has shifted toward a sense of post-colonial guilt."

Dornan highlighted the support of society in restitution, citing the example of Glasgow's move, which must gain the approval of its people and is subject to a parliamentary vote because "the collections belong to the people of Glasgow".

Echoing Dornan's views, Zhang said many factors are behind the trend, including joint international efforts.

The return of artifacts demonstrates the continuing evolution of world civilization and is of great significance for promoting friendly exchanges between different countries and cultures, Zhang said.

It is very important that different civilizations tolerate, coexist and learn from each other in today's world, which promotes the preservation and evolvement of human civilization, Zhang said, stressing that this coincides with the Global Civilization Initiative put forward by Chinese President Xi Jinping in March.

Irreplaceable role

Tolerance, coexistence, exchanges and mutual learning among different civilizations play an irreplaceable role in advancing humanity's modernization and helping world civilization flourish because the future of all countries is closely connected nowadays, Xi said in a speech at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting on March 15.

The repatriation trend in recent years has also led to some Chinese artifacts that were looted overseas being repatriated.

On March 23, 2019, witnessed by Xi and Italy's then-prime minister, Giuseppe Conte, representatives of the two countries exchanged certificates on the return of 796 lost Chinese artifacts in Rome. About two weeks later, returned artworks, dating back to the Neolithic Age and as recently as the Ming and Qing dynasties, arrived in Beijing.

It was the largest return of lost Chinese artifacts in nearly 20 years, followed by the repatriation of 68 artworks from the UK in October 2020 and the restitution of the head of a Buddha statue in the Tianlong Mountain grottoes in Shanxi province from Japan at the end of 2020.

The repatriation of artifacts has accelerated in recent years with efforts from all parties. This not only conforms to the spirit of United Nations conventions but is also a great contribution to human civilization, Zhang said.

"Artifacts carry the genes and bloodline of a nation. They are irreplaceable and excellent resources of civilization for a country. Only by returning those precious works can they be better integrated into research and preservation of local culture."

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (first from left) and Nigerian Culture Minister Layiwola Lai Mohammed (second from left) celebrate the signing of an agreement to return Benin artifacts to Nigeria in Berlin on July 1. IMAGO IMAGES

Into the wild

Scientists Francesca Roncolato, Rob Brewster and Patrick Giumelli of the World Wildlife Fund release a platypus back into the Royal National Park for the first time in more than 50 years, in Sydney, Australia, on Friday. JAIMI JOY / REUTERS

Green tech mooted for ASEAN's growth

By **PRIME SARMIENTO** and **ALICE ZHU** in Jakarta

Green and digital technology will play a key role in driving sustainable development in Southeast Asia, especially for the much-needed green transformation, said analysts and officials at the 2023 Association of Southeast Asian Nations Leadership and Partnership Forum held in Indonesia's capital Jakarta on Friday.

Although ASEAN's current energy demand is only about 5 percent globally, it is steadily rising because of urbanization and industrialization, as the energy sector contributes three-fourths to global carbon emissions. The ASEAN Green Deal, proposed by Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen while chairing the ASEAN Summit 2022, aims at a green future, sustainability, effective use of resources and economic competitiveness.

The green deal is "meaningful" because it is a policy framework available to all ASEAN members, particularly Myanmar, where development needs are again calling for attention, said Albert Oung, executive council member and Green Economy chairperson of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific's Sustainable Business Network.

Innovative technological breakthroughs can help revitalize ASEAN's economy following the pandemic, Oung said.

In Indonesia, digital transformation, along with financial assistance to improve information and communication technology infrastructure, has helped boost the creative industry, said Indonesia's Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy Sandiaga Uno.

The creative industry not only contributes to regional GDP but also creates jobs, he said in a special address, adding that education reforms have helped nurture creative talent.

Ravindra Ngo, founder and CEO of the think tank The Asian Network in Singapore, said that stakeholders, including government, business and civil society, must collaborate to promote sustainable policies and practices to mitigate environmental risks and improve access for all.

"The three Ps — people, planet and profit — are not enough. We need to add purpose — the purpose to make and contribute to a better world," Ngo said.

ASEAN also needs to use technologies and innovations, such as developing a climate-smart agriculture that will help to make the shift toward agricultural and food systems that are "more resilient, sustainable and productive", he said.

In another panel discussion, Oung said, "At least within ASEAN, we can do a lot of things together" on renewable energy.

"Sustainability is actually equal to profitability. Sustainability comes with responsibilities," said Oung, also the founding chairman of the Hong Kong Myanmar Chamber of Commerce.

Rebuilding Myanmar as a great green nation with innovative technologies can help the agricultural sector to relieve the poverty of farmers, he said.

"With the help and protection of ASEAN, Myanmar will be able to gradually sort out its own problems by rebuilding its past glory as a great prosperous nation in the 1950s."

Chhem Siriwat, adviser to the Council for the Development of Cambodia, said that digital transformation "is not just about technology, but about change. It's about a change in mindset, which will eventually lead to a change in behavior".

He said the three main pillars of digital transformation are culture, workforce and technology, and described his experience in helping to craft a national digital technology transformation road map for Cambodia.

"We came up with three suggestions, the first being to appoint transformational leaders. To be a transformational leader, you have to be innovative, risk-taking."

It is also important to invest in human resources and digital infrastructure, he said.

Contact the writers at prime@chinadailyapac.com.

Vintage collection

A man gets up close to photograph a vintage car in Vladivostok, Russia, on Saturday. The city held an exhibition showcasing classic cars and attracting many car enthusiasts. GUO FEIZHOU / XINHUA

Monetary policies blamed for US woes

ISTANBUL — Severe corrosion in the United States' monetary policies, especially in recent years, has caused several problems in US society, a Turkish analyst says.

Murat Tufan, an analyst with the Turkish broadcaster Ekoturk, said the collapse of the middle-class population, increasing homelessness, a distorted health insurance system, difficulty in paying home loans and rising racism are just some of these problems.

Erroneous and inconsiderate policies of the US Federal Reserve have dragged down the middle-income groups in the US and the world, and it is a serious issue as millions of people have slipped into poverty, Tufan said.

"One of the most important reasons for the collapse of the middle class is that all countries have to use the US dollar as a reserve currency (as a medium of exchange)," Tufan said, referring to the use of US dollar across the globe.

When a country uses the dollar it experiences inflation because of the cost of using the greenback, he said.

The printing of trillions of dollars by the Fed, especially during the pandemic, is the biggest reason for inflation, he said. As a result, the income gap between the rich and the poor has widened so disproportionately that it cannot be reduced in a short period of time, he said.

Unfortunate picture

"Income inequality is an unfortunate picture for America, which is known as the world's largest economy," Tufan said.

"Many people in America are barely able to pay their mortgages. The health insurance system is also so tough. It's a huge challenge," he said, adding that the greenback's purchasing power has been falling rapidly.

He also noted that the US Constitution, which dates back to 1789, is "almost impossible to update", and has become the main reason for many problems in society.

"The Constitution was written primarily for landowners from the white male class and to protect their rights. But today humanity has changed, people's demands have changed, and the world has changed, but America's Constitution has not."

One of the crucial issues facing Washington is the debt ceiling crisis, he said. Next month the Senate will decide whether to raise the ceiling. If a solution cannot be found, the country will experience hard times.

The US government cannot print money to meet its needs, and some public institutions and organizations will be closed or have to work at low capacity.

XINHUA

Exhibition showcases centuries-old Chinese culture

By **MINLU ZHANG** in New York
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Two Mandarin ducks, a bouquet of narcissus and a few stalks of bamboo were represented in a birthday gift painting from ancient China hundreds of years ago.

In the Western world, narcissus is associated with self-obsession, whereas in ancient China it represented nobility because of its fragrant nature. Similarly, bamboo signifies celebration in Chinese culture. In the painting in question a gathering of gods and goddesses joyously celebrates longevity, making it a thoughtful birthday gift, said a guide at the China Institute in Manhattan.

This birthday gift is one of more than 100 individual pieces of masterworks by 59 artists in an exhibition at the China Institute Gallery, *Flowers on a River: The Art of Chinese Flower-and-Bird Painting.*

Spanning more than 500 years from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the exhibition unveils collections sourced from the Tianjin Museum in Tianjin and Changzhou Museum in Jiangsu province.

The China Institute held a special dinner on Thursday in honor of Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month and a private tour of the exhibition, which is the first one in the new gallery of the institute.

"The China Institute is all about bringing understanding to Chinese culture," said Yue-sai Kan, co-chair of the institute. "The China Institute is one place that is really doing that really well, and we've been doing it for 97 years. That's really something that no one else can say."

Flower and bird painting is one of the three major genres of Chinese painting. In the exhibition catalog, Yao Yang, director of the Tianjin Museum, said it is "an important genre with distinctive Chinese aesthetic characteristics that have created a world of its own".

The *Flowers on a River* exhibition is the first major one in the US to systematically examine both the stylistic and cultural manifestations of this genre, the China Institute said.

Richness of art

The China Institute Gallery is the only art organization in the US that exclusively showcases the richness of China's 5,000 years of art on a regular basis, Willow Weilan Hai, exhibition lead curator, project director and senior vice-president of the China Institute, said in a preface to the exhibition catalog.

The paintings of the exhibition cover three subjects: "Precious Plums of the Palace: Academicism and Court Artists"; "Fragrant Plums in the Wild: Literati Art, Painters, and Painting Schools"; and "Vitality of Nature: Flower and Bird Painting and Social Customs".

The exhibition includes well-known Chinese painters such as Tang Yin, courtesy name Bohu, a Chinese painter, calligrapher and poet of the Ming Dynasty, and Wu Changshuo, a Chinese calligrapher, painter and seal artist of the late Qing Dynasty.

Through symbolism and imagery, these paintings reveal a unique view of nature, life and art, which combined with other forms of art such as poetry, calligraphy and seals create a powerful aesthetic effect characteristic of East Asia, Yao said.

"I therefore believe this exhibition will provide an opportunity for constructive dialogue between different cultures."

The China Institute, according to its website, was founded in 1926 by US educators John Dewey and Paul Monroe, and Chinese diplomats Hu Shi and Kuo Ping-wen. It is said to be the oldest bicultural, nonprofit organization in the US to focus exclusively on China.

WORLD

Thailand casts vote in key election

Balloting system undergoes major revamp as citizens look for change

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok
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Polls for Thailand's general election closed on Sunday after a smooth vote at the 95,000 polling stations across the country. The election is widely seen as a turning point for a country that has undergone a major change in its election system.

Sunday's voting began at 8 am with about 52 million people casting their ballots to elect 500 members of the lower house of parliament, with about two million voting in early May.

Voting closed at 5 pm, with the Election Commission earlier projecting a turnout of 80 percent, Reuters reported.

Early opinion polls indicated the opposition Pheu Thai, led by Paetongtarn Shinawatra, daughter of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and the youth-led Move Forward parties would gain the most seats, according to the Thai National Institute of Development Administration or Nida Poll.

Move Forward, led by Pita Limjaroenrat, a 42-year-old former tech executive, has also been rising fast in opinion polls. Its young, progressive and ambitious candidates campaigned on a simple but powerful message: Thailand needs to change.

"I think the young generation is yearning for a change, from the continued rule of the elite that resulted in today's inequality to a truly democratic government," said Pravit Tang, a young voter in the capital Bangkok. "At the polling station I visited today, I saw young people more active than ever before. They wanted to have their voices heard in the election, no matter whether their support will make a turning point or not."

A total of 70 parties, 1,898 list-MP candidates and 4,780 MP candidates registered to contest this election, while 63 people have been named as prime ministerial candidates for 43 parties.

"This year's election is seen as a national agenda item to express the power of clean election", said Thai Election Commission Chairman Ittiporn Boonpracong at Saturday's news conference.

Security force deployed

On Sunday, about 150,000 police were deployed to ensure order at the 95,000 polling stations nationwide, according to national police chief Damrongsak Kittiprapas.

Thailand went through a major change in its election system in 2021 to allow capable individuals who lack political support from various fields to rely on parties' reputations to become members of parliament.

Unlike in the previous election in 2019, which adopted a form of mixed-member proportional representation, voters in this year's election got two ballot papers, of which one ballot is used to select a constituency MP and the other to select a party to lead the government.

Of the 500 members of the House of Representatives to be elected, 400 seats are from 400 voting districts across the country, and those who win the election will be directly seated in the House of Representatives. For the 100 party-list members, they will be divided based on how many votes the political parties get during the election.

Prayut Chan-o-cha, Prime Minister and the United Thai National Party's chief strategist and No 1 prime ministerial candidate, said in a recent interview with the newspaper Bangkok Post that the formation of the next government will depend on the negotiations between parties prompted by the ballots casts.

Agencies contributed to this story.

A monk walks as people line up to cast their ballot at a polling station in Bangkok on Sunday. LILLIAN SUWANRUMPHA / AFP

Medical care

A doctor from the Chinese peacekeeping medical team examines a patient for free at a care and development center in southern Lebanon on Friday. The medical team was lauded for providing timely care and service to the needy. LI CHENGJUN / XINHUA

Texas' grim choice: guns or mental health

By MAY ZHOU in Houston
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Following a shooting at a shopping mall on May 6 in which eight people were killed, the Governor of Texas, Greg Abbott, said the way to prevent such killings was to tackle mental health issues. Yet the state's mental health services have been severely rundown since he became governor eight years ago.

According to Mental Health America, for the overall ranking of mental health, Texas' national rank went from 27th to 44th based on its report of 2022 State of Mental Health in America, which compared figures of 2017-18 with those of 2018-19.

When it comes to mental health services for young people, Texas' rank went from 30th place to 41st because more children were not covered for such services. And more than 40 percent of Texas adults did not see a doctor for cognitive disability because for them it cost too much.

When it comes to access to mental health services, Texas ranked the worst in the country, and for the prevalence of mental health problems, the state ranked fourth.

Houston Public Media reported on Thursday that mass shootings like the one in Allen prompt calls for gun reforms and finger-pointing at mental health issues, but change rarely happens on either, and some lawmakers blame mental health issues, not guns, for mass shootings.

"We are working to address that anger and violence by going to its root cause, which is addressing the mental health problems behind it," Abbott was quoted as telling Fox News.

Critics say lawmakers use mental health as a way to distract from their lack of action on gun reforms, said the report, quoting Nicole Golden, the executive director of Texas Gun Sense, as saying that "it's a way those who know that they're not going to vote with us for political reasons on sensible gun safety measures are trying to distract and divert the conversation to another direction."

The Texas Department of Public Safety's Regional Director Hank Sibley said that the government should be strengthening the background check system. "Multiple bills in the legislature aimed to do that. But Golden said most didn't move forward," the report said.

Golden said most people support common sense gun reforms, like background checks and increasing the age to buy a firearm in Texas to 21. A University of Texas at Austin survey found that 76 percent of Texans said they support raising the age. But Abbott has said he opposes doing so, it added.

Last year Abbott reallocated $210.7 million from Texas Health and Human Services to fund a border protection program. Even though the fund was later replenished, it is unclear that mental health services were not interrupted or affected.

At the same time, Abbott has done much to relax the state's gun regulations, and the number of firearm-related deaths has reached a record high for the past decade.

In 2014, the year before Abbott became governor, there were 2,848 firearm-related deaths in Texas, a rate of 10.7 per 100,000 people. That number has steadily climbed each year, and there were 4,613 such deaths, 15.6 per 100,000, in 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said.

Since 2015, the Republican-controlled state legislature has passed scores of laws to relax gun control, a few of them major changes. That year a "campus carry law" was passed, allowing people with handgun licenses to carry concealed handguns on college campuses. Previously, firearms were banned at schools and educational institutions.

The next year an "open carry law" was passed, allowing people with a license to carry a handgun openly in public places where it is allowed.

Regulations were further relaxed when "permitless carry" measures were adopted in 2021. These allow anyone 21 or over to carry a handgun openly or concealed in public places where it is allowed without obtaining a license.

A man who did not want his girlfriend to get an abortion fatally shot her during a confrontation in a Dallas parking lot, police said, The Associated Press reported. The man was jailed on a murder charge as of Friday.

Gabriella Gonzalez was with her boyfriend, Harold Thompson, on Wednesday when he tried to put her in a chokehold, according to an arrest warrant affidavit.

Xinhua and agencies contributed to this story.

Ruling BJP trounced in Indian state polls

NEW DELHI — India's main opposition party, the Indian National Congress, or INC, on Saturday won the assembly elections in the southern state of Karnataka, unseating the ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP.

Congress won 135 seats against 66 for the BJP in the 224-member legislature, the Election Commission website showed at the end of counting.

A party needs to win at least 113 assembly constituencies to form government in the state.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the INC on its win. He tweeted, "Congratulations to the Congress Party for their victory in the Karnataka Assembly polls. My best wishes to them in fulfilling people's aspirations."

Hailing his party's victory, INC leader Mallikarjun Kharge tweeted, "This is truly the victory of the people of Karnataka. They have voted for their progressive future, their welfare and social justice. With folded hands, we thank them for putting their trust in us."

The election is the first of five crucial state polls this year that are seen as setting the tone for parliamentary elections due in April and May 2024, Reuters reported.

It is also the first big electoral faceoff between the BJP and the INC since Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was convicted of defamation in March and lost his parliament seat.

"(The) Congress party stood with the poor in Karnataka, we fought on the issues of the poor," Gandhi told reporters.

Karnataka is home to about 65 million people and is considered the BJP's gateway to southern India.

"We accept the verdict of people of Karnataka with due respect, we will take this verdict in our stride," Basavaraj Bommai, the BJP's outgoing chief minister of Karnataka, tweeted.

"We will analyze and correct our mistakes and rebuild the party and come back during parliamentary elections."

XINHUA—AGENCIES

Argentina reels from climate woes

By SERGIO HELD in Bogota
For China Daily

A record drought has deeply affected Argentina's agricultural production, dealing another blow to the economy and hurting exports of key commodities such as soybeans.

"We have been witnessing a historic drought, completely atypical, with abysmal damage, especially for the Argentine economy," said Salvador Vitelli, chief researcher at Romano Group, an economic and financial consultancy firm in Argentina.

"It has been the worst drought of the century. It is estimated that the loss of the exportable balance will be between $20 billion and $22 billion, in terms of production value."

One of the most affected agricultural products has been soybean, which accounts for about 3.5 percent of the country's GDP and is a large generator of foreign currency.

A heat wave accompanied by flash frosts in late February and into the middle of March has left a trail of despair, uncertainty and anguish throughout the countryside.

The drought has led to rises in soybean prices on the global market, rises that were limited by a bumper crop in Brazil.

About 70 percent of the US dollars that Argentina has received over the past 20 years from exports are related to agriculture and the related value chain, Vitelli said. "Therefore, it is clear … how important the agricultural sector is in terms of economic aggregates."

Lower output

CREA, a nonprofit civil association in Buenos Aires made up of and directed by agricultural entrepreneurs who meet in groups to pool their expertise and knowledge, warned that the soybean yield in Argentina will be 41 percent lower this year than that expected at the beginning of the season.

And expectations are for a yield of 49 percent for the second harvest because the crop "was severely affected by an unprecedented early frost in February", CREA said.

"Ninety-five percent of CREA farmers reported having experienced drought damage in the last four months, while another 45 percent and 7 percent reported production losses due to frost and hail (respectively)."

Cristian Russo, an agronomist with the Rosario Board of Trade, a nonprofit association in a key agricultural region 300 kilometers northeast of Buenos Aires, said the drought has left no subsector untouched. "In order to have a good season we need something that is especially important for corn and soybean planting, and that is good rainfall this autumn. Unfortunately, it was bad news that April did not meet what was expected … (with) only 30 percent of the rainfall that was expected."

The heat wave in March led to the worst national yields in the past 15 crop cycles, the not-for-profit Rosario Board of Trade said.

"Argentina had been suffering from an unprecedented drought since before planting," the association said in a report last month. "The heat wave aggravated the effects of thermo-hydric stress, taking them to an extreme that is unprecedented for the sector."

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

Capital Development Authority
(Directorate of Sanitation)

INVITATION FOR INTERNATIONAL PRE-QUALIFICATION
FOR
OUTSOURCING OF SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT SERVICES IN ISLAMABAD

The Capital Development Authority (CDA) intends to invite applications from eligible (as per the criteria laid down in Pre-Qualification document) for **"Outsourcing of Solid Waste Management Services in Islamabad"** through an International Competitive bidding process as envisaged in PPRA Rules, 2004 as amended from time to time.

Pre-Qualification Document (PQD) would be available on and after date of publication of this advertisement. Interested firms/companies/applicants may view and download the PQD from the CDA & PPRA website (for reading purpose only). The applicant shall acquire PQD from the office of Deputy Director Sanitation, Street # 49, Sector G-6/1-4, Islamabad on any working day during office hours on payment of USD. 500/- (in shape of bank draft or equivalent in favor of Deputy Director Sanitation / DDO Sanitation or against fee through pay order or bank draft of Pak Rs.150,000/- (non-refundable) in favor of Deputy Director Sanitation / DDO Sanitation.

A pre meeting prior to PQD submission shall be held on **June 26, 2023** at **11:00 hours** in the office of Director Sanitation, CDA located in Street # 49, Sector G-6/1-4, Islamabad.

Applications for Pre-Qualification (signed and stamped) must be delivered in sealed envelopes by hand or through registered mail to the office of Director Sanitation, CDA located in Street # 49, Sector G-6/1-4, Islamabad up to **July 06, 2023** at **11:30** hours and be clearly marked "Outsourcing of Solid Waste Management Services in Islamabad". Applications will be opened on the same day at **12:00 hours** in the presence of the prospective applicants or their representatives who choose to be present. Electronic mail is not allowed.

CDA will not be responsible for any cost or expense incurred by applicants in connection with the preparation or delivery of applications. In case of official holiday on the day of submission, next day will be treated as application submission and opening day.

Further clarification, if required, can be obtained from the Deputy Director Sanitation (Phone No. +92-051-9223171) or visit Directorate of Sanitation CDA on any working day during office hours.

(MUHAMMAD ATTAULLAH)
Director Sanitation, CDA
Ph: +92-51-9211555

WORLD

Zelensky visits Berlin to discuss military package

Ukraine president meets German counterpart; antimissile systems, tanks and drones offered

BERLIN — Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky held talks on Sunday with his German counterpart at the start of his first visit to Germany since the Ukraine crisis began, with Berlin offering support in the form of a huge new military package.

"Already in Berlin," Zelensky wrote on Twitter. "Weapons. Powerful package. Air defense. Reconstruction. EU. NATO. Security."

Zelensky's trip came after a day of meetings in Rome with Italian leaders and Pope Francis.

Ukrainian forces have been training a new contingent of forces and stockpiling Western-supplied munitions and hardware that analysts say will be key to reclaiming territory captured by Russia.

Zelensky was greeted by President Frank-Walter Steinmeier at Bellevue Palace, where he signed the guest book before the pair headed into talks.

The Ukrainian leader's schedule for Germany has not yet been officially confirmed but he was expected to meet Chancellor Olaf Scholz later on Sunday.

He may also head to the western German city of Aachen, which this year is awarding him and the Ukrainian people the Charlemagne prize, an honor awarded for efforts to foster European unity.

Bild daily said Zelensky's flight to Aachen on a German government plane would be secured by the air force.

Scholz, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki are due to attend the ceremony in Aachen.

In a clear show of its backing for Kyiv, Berlin on Saturday said it would send Ukraine more firing units and launchers for the Iris-T antimissile system, 30 additional Leopard 1 tanks, more than 100 armored combat vehicles and more than 200 surveillance drones.

High-tech German-made Leopard 2A6 tanks sought by Kyiv have already been put to use on the front lines, Bundeswehr chief Carsten Breuer had confirmed during a recent trip to Ukraine.

Zelensky's visit also came before a G7 summit scheduled to be held in Hiroshima, Japan, starting on Friday, during which the G7 industrial powers and the European Union will ban Russian gas imports on routes where Moscow has cut supplies, the Financial Times reported on Sunday, citing officials involved in the negotiations.

The decision, to be finalized by G7 leaders at the summit, will prevent the resumption of Russian pipeline gas exports on routes to countries such as Poland and Germany, where Moscow cut off supplies last year, the newspaper said.

On the front lines, near the eastern flashpoint town of Bakhmut, both sides claimed to be making progress.

"Our soldiers are moving forward in some areas of the front, and the enemy is losing equipment and manpower," commander of the Ukrainian ground forces Oleksandr Syrskyi said on social media.

Russia said its forces were still pushing inside Bakhmut.

"In the Donetsk direction, assault detachments liberated a block in the northwestern part of the city of Artemovsk," the defense ministry said, referring to Bakhmut by its Russian name.

Western allies have delivered increasingly powerful weapons to Ukraine. Britain last week announced it was sending Storm Shadow missiles, becoming the first country to send longer-range arms to Kyiv.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Hiroshima residents protest against summit

HIROSHIMA, Japan — Hundreds of Japanese citizens took to the streets in the city of Hiroshima on Saturday to protest against the upcoming G7 Summit from May 19 to 21.

Protests were also going to be held on Sunday, starting from Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, a cenotaph where an atomic bomb was dropped by the United States during World War II.

About 200 citizens carrying banners reading "No G7" and "No War" gathered in Hiroshima to protest against the summit on Saturday as Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited the city to inspect the summit venues.

Shigeo Kimoto, director of the Japanese civic group Peace Depot, said that the joint military exercises among G7 members in the Pacific region and Japan's statement that "Taiwan contingency is a contingency for Japan" are "absurd and dangerous".

Japan has concealed its ugly history as a perpetrator by stressing that it is "the only country that suffered atomic bombings", historian Toshiyuki Tanaka said at Saturday's rally.

"Now Japan is politically using Hiroshima, the site of the atomic bombing, to hold the G7 Summit. It is time for people in Hiroshima to wake up," said Tanaka, also an emeritus professor at Hiroshima City University.

The protests were launched by the executive committee of citizen's group questioning the upcoming summit, whose declaration was released on Saturday.

XINHUA

Border impasse

Immigrants seeking asylum in the United States, stuck in a makeshift camp between border walls between the US and Mexico, stand in line (left) to be transported as US Customs and Border Protection officers keep watch on Saturday in San Diego, California. MARIO TAMA / GETTY IMAGES

Briefly

TURKIYE

Elections for presidency, parliament underway

Voters in Turkiye were heading to the polls on Sunday for landmark parliamentary and presidential elections that were expected to be tightly contested and could be the biggest challenge President Recep Tayyip Erdogan faces in his two decades in power. The vote will either grant Erdogan a new five-year term in office or set the country on a different path. Polling began at 8 am local time and was scheduled to close at 5 pm. Media organizations were barred from reporting partial results until 9 pm. There were no exit polls.

SOMALIA

Heavy rain causes flooding, displaces 200,000 people

About 200,000 people have been displaced due to flash flooding in central Somalia, a regional official said on Saturday, as the Shabelle River burst its banks and submerged roads. Inhabitants of Beledweyne town in Hiran region were forced out of their homes as heavy rainfall caused water levels to rise sharply. "It is a preliminary figure now," said Ali Osman Hussein, deputy governor for social affairs in the region.

NEPAL

Sherpa guide scales Qomolangma for 26th time

A Sherpa guide on Sunday scaled Qomolangma, known as Mount Everest in the West, for the 26th time, matching the record set by a fellow Nepalese guide for the most ascents of the world's highest peak. Pasang Dawa Sherpa reached the summit along with a Hungarian climber, according to the expedition organizer Imagine Nepal Treks. The season's first wave of climbers reached the summit this weekend as Sherpa guides fixed ropes and made paths for the hundreds of climbers who will attempt to scale the peak over the next few weeks.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Upgrading trade to deepen global recovery

Exporters ride policy support and FTAs, innovate, turn nimble and resilient for growth

By ZHONG NAN
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Cars for export wait to be loaded at Yantai Port in Yantai, Shandong province, on April 3. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Left: Purchasers get to know China's new energy vehicles during the 133rd China Import and Export Fair in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on April 15. LIU DAWEI / XINHUA **Right:** Workers produce solar batteries for export at a photovoltaic enterprise in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, on Jan 3. SI WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

China's foreign trade is resilient in a challenging, uncertain environment as the players concerned continue to innovate and be nimble for steady growth, riding policy support for new growth points, observers said.

For instance, in November last year, Ding Yandong, president of Rollmax Shutter Component Co Ltd, a Ningbo, Zhejiang province-based roller shutter component manufacturer, rode into bad luck upon arrival at Heathrow Airport, London.

His hectic seven-day business trip was to take him to as many as six cities in England and Wales. The goal was to retain old customers and seek new orders. But, a local railway strike threw a spanner into his schedule, forcing him to hire an expensive taxi — some 300 pounds ($375.7) for the 220-kilometer London-Norwich stretch — to keep his appointment with his first client, a local manufacturer of smart home products.

Every pound was worth it and then some, Ding said, as the meeting went on for around five hours, during which product samples and their functions were thoroughly understood. The British client was also able to dispel his own lingering concerns about Rollmax's products. An expression of intent was signed on the spot that later led to a new business order.

"Our European clients are very straightforward and tend to express doubts initially about the quality of Chinese products. But their exacting standards and expectations actually help us to increase the added value of our products," said Ding, noting many misunderstandings can be easily resolved through face-to-face communication.

With China introducing fresh policy measures to stimulate exports and support domestic companies' industrial upgrade, as well as make better use of bilateral and free trade agreements to sustain its economic growth this year, Ding no longer has a dire need to travel abroad. His trips dropped in the first half of this year as more foreign buyers visited his factory in Ningbo over the past four months.

Like heads of many domestic companies, he has been busy booking booths at and participating in large trade shows such as the China Import and Export Fair (Canton Fair), the Appliance & Electronics World Expo and the China International Industry Fair to land more orders. He has also been spending a lot of time to develop cost-effective products for clients in Southeast Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

Thanks to China's optimized COVID-19 management policy, the operation of new shipping routes and fast-growing business sectors like new energy vehicles and solar batteries, the country is expected to further vitalize companies in the foreign trade sector while forging stronger trade cooperation with developed as well as emerging economies, market watchers and government officials said.

They said such endeavors will expand and upgrade China's trade and also will be conducive to global economic recovery, amid negative factors like protectionism and geo-economic fragmentation.

Supported by resurgent overseas demand, closer business ties with emerging markets and various efforts for industrial upgrade, China's foreign trade grew by 5.8 percent year-on-year to 13.32 trillion yuan ($1.92 trillion) in the first four months of 2023; exports rose 10.6 percent on a yearly basis to 7.67 trillion yuan, and imports edged up 0.02 percent year-on-year to 5.65 trillion yuan, data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

With many foreign retailers running out of stock since late last year, a large number of global business-people have started to order from Chinese exporters, said Bai Ming, deputy director of international market research at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

With inconvenient travel conditions of the last three years now a thing of the past, many of them are willing to visit China to participate in different trade fairs and visit factories, further easing concerns about the country's 2023 export outlook, Bai said, adding many Chinese exporters have also set up livestreaming studios within their factories, directly promoting a wide variety of products ranging from shoes to excavators to overseas buyers.

Rather than waiting for foreign trade orders to flow in, Huizhou Macc Electronics Co Ltd, an electronic component manufacturer in Guangdong province, dispatched a sales team to visit overseas clients in the Middle East, Europe, the United States and the Republic of Korea in the first quarter of this year.

"We are confident and highly motivated after a decent start in the first quarter. We will strive to increase our production value by 10 percent this year," said Zhang Qian, the company's general manager.

Acknowledging that the market environment has turned out to be more difficult than expected, he said several of the companies' previous clients from India, Vietnam and Turkiye have already transformed and grown. They have emerged as the company's strong rivals in the same market segment. Sales staff members from the new rivals even pretended to be potential customers and asked Zhang and his engineers highly technical questions at the company's booth during different exhibitions abroad.

"Of course, we didn't respond to such questions, but these emerging economies, supported by an increasingly sophisticated industrial system, combined with closer proximity to Europe and the ability to export duty-free products to many countries across the world, have gradually turned out to be competitors of Chinese exporters in the areas of medium and low-end manufacturing, he said.

Dealing with challenges posed by certain Western countries out to contain China's industrial chains, the country's manufacturing sector has become more aware of the subsequent challenges posed by such actions, said Lin Meng, director of the Modern Supply Chain Research Institute, which is part of the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

As a result, China's drive for industrial upgrade has gained further impetus, augmenting the country's capabilities across various domains like the industrial chains related to new energy and green development, she said.

SAIC Motor Corp Ltd, China's largest carmaker by sales, has been heading in that direction. The company said deliveries of its hatchback MG4 Electric reached 10,000 units in Europe in March.

There are now around 40,000 orders in Europe to be delivered, said Zhao Aimin, executive vice-president of SAIC International, noting one key ingredient of the group's success in overseas markets is its offer of the right products based on an understanding of local customers' demands.

To better meet the demand of overseas car buyers and potential customers, Zhao said he has a four-hour meeting with the company's research and development team each week.

Keen to facilitate more Chinese companies to ship their products to other parts of the world, China, a member of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement, is also seeking to join high-standard economic and trade agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement, said Zhang Jianping, head of the center for regional economic cooperation at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

With the RCEP set to take effect in the Philippines — the last member economy to ratify of the agreement — on June 2, the agreement's complete implementation will help further bolster trade and investment between China and other participating countries, and will advance long-term prosperity and growth of the global economy, Zhang said.

According to Customs data, China's trade value with other RCEP signatory countries rose 7.3 percent year-on-year in the first quarter of this year.

Chinese authorities had issued 201,700 certificates of origin under the RCEP agreement by March. The certificates are related to exports valued at $8.41 billion, and are expected to reduce tariffs by $126 million for Chinese products in importing RCEP countries, data from Beijing-headquartered China Council for the Promotion of International Trade showed.

Certificates of origin are documents widely used in international trade transactions. They state that the products listed have met sufficient criteria to be considered as originating in a particular country. The issuance of these certificates is widely regarded as a barometer of foreign trade.

China had 457,000 companies with export and import records in the first quarter of this year, up 5.7 percent year-on-year, according to Customs data.

Wu Haiping, director-general of the General Administration of Customs' department of general operations, said that in order to address the difficulties and bottlenecks faced by foreign-trade enterprises, the Customs authority will focus on improving trade facilitation, streamlining import and export logistics, optimizing the business environment at ports, reducing enterprises' cost burdens and supporting the development of new foreign trade formats.

"We will continuously enrich, adjust and improve relevant measures and explore new Customs support initiatives to support China's foreign trade this year," he said, adding that 90,000 companies registered in the first quarter to engage in export and import activities, up 59.8 percent year-on-year.

Beyond developed world lie opportunities in emerging sectors

REPORTER'S LOG

By Zhong Nan

Despite various internal and external pressures, China's foreign trade has achieved a stable start in the first four months of this year. An analysis of the trend should include a reference to the comparison base effect. The concentrated release of demand due to factors like the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the soaring replenishment demand of overseas retailers, has pushed up China's exports and imports during this period.

However, many pressures still persist and market watchers have called on the government to pay more attention to the sustainability of foreign trade growth.

The National Bureau of Statistics revealed that the official purchasing managers index for China's manufacturing sector stood at 49.2 in April, down from 51.9 in March, indicating that international market demand is not strong enough and the pressure on foreign trade has not been completely relieved.

To sustain their export growth, many exporters have made efforts to shorten the cycle from industrial development to foreign trade growth by increasing investment in research and development on the one hand, and expanding the pace of opening-up and going global on the other, so that their products could have a better chance of gaining greater recognition and access in the global market.

Foreign trade is a slow variable and has a time lag. From signing new export orders to issuing production tasks and actual delivery, as well as cross-border transportation logistics, it usually takes three to six months. The growth of foreign trade value in the first four months of this year is likely to have come from orders completed between July and December last year.

Even though some foreign institutions predict a bleak outlook for China's foreign trade this year, Chinese exporters, backed by resilient industrial and supply chains, are able to strive for survival and development opportunities in difficult times, achieving results beyond pessimistic expectations.

In order to remain competitive, Chinese companies should not solely focus on the United States and Europe, where market demand is weakening and risks in financial services are rising. Instead, they should further expand their market presence in member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and many economies participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, especially those in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America. This will help compensate for the loss of weakened demand from many developed countries.

The rising trade value between China and other RCEP countries in the first quarter is a solid example supporting this view. It grew 7.3 percent year-on-year to 3.08 trillion yuan ($443.34 billion), accounting for 31.2 percent of China's total foreign trade, data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

In addition to relying on digital, green and technology empowerment to ensure their market share in developed markets and deal with disruptions caused by geopolitics and protectionism, Chinese companies' global strategies and increasing investment in overseas markets are practical and effective for optimizing their country's foreign trade structure and stabilizing its huge scale.

According to the Ministry of Commerce, China's nonfinancial outbound direct investment rose 26.3 percent year-on-year to 215.97 billion yuan in the first quarter of 2023.

China's foreign trade has undergone several transformations over the past few decades. Initially, it relied on processing trade and labor-intensive production. After years of capital and technology accumulation, it shifted toward exporting high value-added products and signing more free trade agreements.

With many parts of the world entering a new era of green and innovation-led growth, the country has also started relying on green-themed products, digital trade and cross-border e-commerce to remain competitive.

Digital trade refers to trade in goods and services that are digitally ordered and delivered, such as cross-border e-commerce and digitally enabled transactions of trade in services. According to information released by the Geneva-based United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, digital trade accounts for a growing share of international trade.

BUSINESS

A visitor checks out products during the spring edition of the Intertextile Shanghai Apparel Fabrics trade fair held at the city's National Exhibition and Convention Center on March 29. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Messe Frankfurt to hold more biz exhibitions across China

Organizer encouraged by development, favorable conditions to drive sales

By ZHONG NAN
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With numerous Chinese companies rushing to participate in various trade shows at both home and abroad in recent months, Messe Frankfurt, one of the world's largest trade fair and event organizers by sales revenue, is set to hold more than 40 business exhibitions across China in 2023, said its top executive.

Due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the German company managed to hold only 11 trade fairs in China last year.

Many opportunities come from China's optimization of its COVID-19 response, foreign trade and investment packages and support for the private sector, said Wolfgang Marzin, the group's president and CEO.

Messe Frankfurt will organize several major trade fairs and events, such as the China International Trade Fair for Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning, Sanitation and Home Comfort Systems in May in Beijing, the China (Shenzhen) Cross-Border E-commerce Fair in September in Guangdong province and the Shanghai International Trade Fair for Automotive Parts, Equipment and Service Suppliers in November.

Marzin, who attended the spring edition of the Intertextile Shanghai Apparel Fabrics fair held at the city's National Exhibition and Convention Center in late March, said China has always been and will continue to be a vital market for trade, adding that Messe Frankfurt is keen to put on more high-end industrial and trade fairs in China in the coming years.

Apart from running foreign trade, investment, the digital economy and healthcare-themed events, he said many Chinese companies from sectors like electronics, automotive, green development, chemicals and consumer goods have surging demand to participate in trade fairs in recent years.

Supported by 2,500 employees at more than 30 locations across the world, the services provided by the Frankfurt-based group include renting exhibition grounds, trade fair construction and marketing, personnel and food services.

"Even though China's convention and exhibition industry was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the sector is facing a new round of growth opportunities from supportive policies and digital tools," Marzin said, noting the industry is naturally connected to the upstream and downstream of various industries.

He added that this will not only lead the industry to more comprehensive and higher-end development, but it will also act as a bridge for global industrial and supply chains.

As the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership pact has created favorable conditions to boost two-way investment and foreign trade, Marzin predicted companies from signatory countries will have more demand to participate in various trade shows in the Asia-Pacific region in the years ahead.

Zhao Ping, vice-dean of the academy of Beijing-based China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT), said that judging from the recovery of China's convention and exhibition industry between January and April, the effects of exhibitions in various industries have generally exceeded expectations.

With the recovery of China's economy, the exhibitions focused on promoting traditional consumption, the growth of service consumption, and the advocacy of green and low-carbon consumption will achieve rapid growth, according to the CCPIT.

As of the end of March, the council received 519 applications from domestic organizers for overseas exhibitions this year. These trade fairs will be held in 47 countries, including the United States, Germany, France, Japan, Thailand and Brazil.

Faced with softening external demand and fierce competition from countries such as Vietnam and India in the area of low-end production over the past three years, Chinese manufacturers — especially those from coastal provinces such as Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong — have been boosting their presence at domestic and international expos, as well as expanding channels in emerging markets to drive sales overseas this year.

Professional industrial exhibitions serve as a crucial connection between the supply and demand sides in industrial and supply chains, said Chen Dexing, president of Wenzhou Kanger Crystallite Utensils Co Ltd, a Zhejiang province-based glass and ceramic ware manufacturer with more than 1,500 employees.

"They play a key role in advancing the traditional manufacturing industry's transformation and upgrading by showcasing advanced technologies and facilitating the growth of new driving forces and advantages," he said, adding that the company has already booked exhibition areas at trade shows held in Guangzhou, Tokyo and Birmingham in the United Kingdom for the second half.

Listed innovative firms' robust earnings spur economic growth

BEIJING — China's listed innovation-driven enterprises reported solid revenue and profit increases for 2022 along with intensified R&D spending, demonstrating their potential in driving economic growth in the country's new development stage.

Market data show that the revenue and net profit growth of such enterprises outpaced overall expansion. Firms listed on the sci-tech innovation board of the Shanghai Stock Exchange last year saw their net profits rise by 6 percent year-on-year to total 113.59 billion yuan ($16.35 billion), according to the Shanghai bourse.

The Shenzhen Stock Exchange said companies on its Nasdaq-style ChiNext board raked in 241.76 billion yuan in net profits, up 11 percent over a year earlier. The 191 firms on the Beijing Stock Exchange, predominantly small and medium-sized enterprises, profited 12.17 percent more than that in 2021.

Analysts say innovation is the engine behind the stellar performance of these companies, whose R&D spending also rose at a faster pace than the aggregate of the 5,079 listed companies in China last year.

R&D spending of companies on the sci-tech innovation board stands at 16 percent of their revenue on average, up 3 percentage points from a year ago, according to the Shanghai bourse. The Beijing Stock Exchange said its companies boosted their R&D staff by 13.34 percent.

"Continued R&D investment helped expand business for listed firms, with green and digital transformation making marked contributions," said Zhang Ping, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, adding that ramping up R&D also boosted earnings and pricing power.

On top of R&D commitments, refinancing and incentive stock options are also at the disposal of innovative firms to retain key resources for long-term growth, according to analysts.

The further expansion of innovative firms aligns with China's economic priorities in the new development stage, largely due to their increasingly important role in driving the economy.

A meeting of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee in late April stressed the need to consolidate the foundation of self-reliance and strength in science and technology, while a meeting of the Central Commission for Financial and Economic Affairs on May 5 urged institutional arrangements to ensure the principal position of enterprises in sci-tech innovation.

Chinese companies have witnessed the effects of sci-tech innovation on industrial development. In 2022, 889 high-tech public companies posted a 9.4-percent year-on-year uptick in value-added output, higher than the 4.9 percent average of all listed firms, market data showed.

Innovation-driven firms can also help with China's reiterated pledge to build a modern industrial system underpinned by the real economy. To that end, the meeting on May 5 called for a series of efforts, including seizing opportunities presented by the new scientific and technological revolution, promoting the efficient aggregation of global innovation factors, and boosting the intelligent, green and integrated development of industries.

According to the Beijing Stock Exchange, around 80 percent of the funds its companies raised in 2022 went to cutting-edge fields like the green and low-carbon sector, digital economy, high-end equipment manufacturing and new materials.

"Sci-tech innovation and emerging industries, backed by the continued influx of R&D funds, have made industry chains more independent and spurred the high-quality development of the real economy," said Sun Jinju, an analyst with Kaiyuan Securities.

XINHUA

A staff member walks past the Shenzhen Stock Exchange in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on Sept 21, 2020.
MAO SIQIAN / XINHUA

BUSINESSINSIGHT

Nation showing more signs of recovery

EAGLE EYE

By Ren Zeping

Regarding the ongoing debate about whether we are in economic recovery or whether deflation runs the risk of derailing a comeback, we clearly state that the current situation is the beginning of an economic recovery, not a deflationary cycle. There are five takeaways regarding the economic situation this year — China will once again lead the world in terms of economic recovery; the real estate market is witnessing some green shoots of resurgence; the stock market is expected to witness a structural bull market; the country will maintain an accommodative monetary policy; the US Federal Reserve will likely pause rate hikes and will start cutting interest rates going forward.

We believe that China's economy is at the starting point of a new round of recovery.

China's GDP grew by 4.5 percent year-on-year in the first quarter, exceeding market expectations and kicking off the year on a positive note.

We predict that if we make a full effort to boost the economy and consolidate the momentum of economic recovery, China's GDP will likely expand over 8 percent year-on-year in the second quarter, with full-year GDP growth of about 6 percent in 2023.

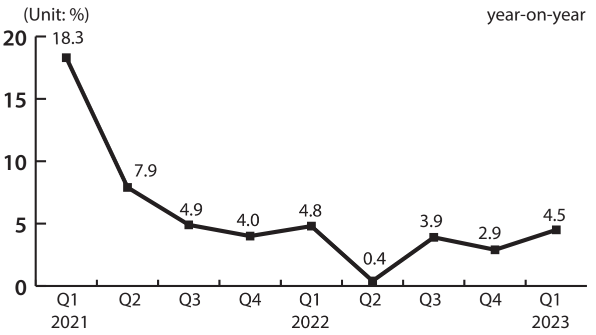
Looking at the three major economies around the world, the US economy is moving from stagflation to mild recession, the European economy is moving from recession to deep recession, and China's economy is bottoming out to mild recovery.

China's economy is on a recovery track, social financing and credit are expanding beyond expectations and credit demand within the real economy is rebounding. China's outstanding aggregate social financing jumped 10 percent year-on-year as of the end of March, a 0.1 percentage point higher than that of the previous month. The country's new yuan-denominated loans totaled 3.89 trillion yuan ($559.7 billion) in March. China's broad money supply, or M2, surged 12.7 percent from the year prior, 0.2 percentage point slower than the previous month.

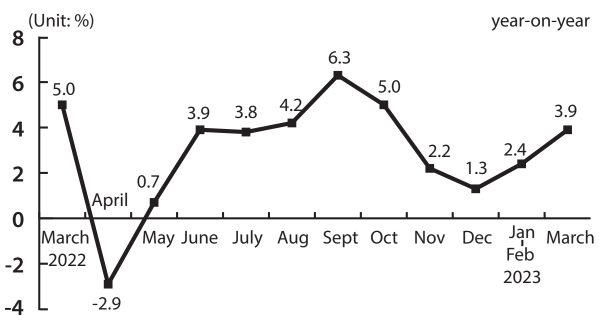
China's investment in infrastructure and high-tech manufacturing industries continued to grow. In March, investment in infrastructure construction, excluding water, electricity and gas, increased 8.7 percent year-on-year, and investment in manufacturing rose 6.2 percent. Investment in electrical machinery related to "new infrastructure", electronic equipment manufacturing and automobile manufacturing grew by 51.5 percent, 12.1 percent and 15.6 percent in March, respectively.

CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

China's quarterly GDP growth



China's monthly industrial output growth



Source: National Bureau of Statistics

LIU CHEN / CHINA DAILY

In March, exports increased 14.8 percent year-on-year. The industrial structure upgrading has promoted high growth in new energy vehicles, lithium batteries and solar cells. And China's exports to ASEAN, India, Brazil and Russia have increased significantly. However, China still faces export pressure.

China is also witnessing a rebound in consumer spending and the rapid recovery of offline scenarios. In March, the country's retail sales increased by 10.6 percent year-on-year.

A State Council executive meeting held in early April said the country will make more efforts to stabilize foreign trade, employment and expectations, accurately assessing the pulse of the Chinese economy. Recently, a series of policies have been introduced to boost confidence in the private economy.

While being optimistic about the prospects of China's economic recovery, we also recommend maintaining rational optimism and paying attention to employment and prices. The foundation of economic recovery is not yet solid, and we still need to make more efforts to shore up the economy to avoid deflation.

We need to focus on the employment of young people aged 16 to 24. In March, the surveyed urban unemployment rate and the surveyed urban unemployment rate of 31 large cities came in at 5.3 percent and 5.5 percent, respectively, a decrease of 0.3 and 0.2 percentage point from the previous month. The unemployment rate for young people aged 16 to 24 stood at 19.6 percent, an increase of 1.5 percentage points from the previous month.

In March, China's consumer price index, a main gauge of inflation, rose by 0.7 percent year-on-year, a decrease of 0.3 percentage point from the previous month. The producer price index, which gauges factory-gate prices, fell by 2.5 percent year-on-year in March. The decline in prices was dragged down by factors such as high base effects, hog prices, the impact of international commodity prices and price wars in the automobile industry.

While taking note of the signs of economic recovery, we should also be aware that market confidence and the endogenous driving force are still weak and insufficient.

Looking ahead to the second quarter, we should keep an eye on the following three factors: the future evolution of the recovery in the property market and its impact on consumer confidence; the potential for the recovery of consumption, which is closely related to expectations, incomes and employment; and pressure on China's exports amid declining external demand.

China's economy is in the early stages of recovery and faces problems such as insufficient demand. Only by fully boosting the economy can we prevent deflation. The key is to boost confidence and step up macroeconomic policy support in terms of fiscal, monetary and industrial policies, which will support the real economy and expand domestic demand.

The country should focus on boosting the development of "new infrastructure" and new energy, which are important means for both the short-term expansion of effective demand and long-term expansion of effective supply.

China needs to make a big push to promote better collaboration between enterprises, universities and research institutes, which encourages technological innovation and applications of related technologies. It also needs to further expand the scope of the pilot program of real estate investment trusts, or REITs, and implement strategies for developing metropolitan areas and city clusters.

The country should also improve the childbirth policy system and provide preferential measures for child-rearing. In the short term, it will stimulate consumption and boost investor confidence. In the long term, an increasing population and human capital improvement can enhance China's innovation, competitiveness and its long-term potential growth rate. To build a support system for childbearing, the country needs to introduce more preferential tax policies, provide childcare services, boost education investment and strengthen women's rights in the workplace.

Ren Zeping is an online influencer and former chief economist of property giant Evergrande.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Green Silk Road drives sustainable development in BRI landscape

MAIN STREET

By Anthony Xiao and Ding Yifei

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) remains one of China's most important global programs. In the past, most efforts were related to promoting the primary targets of the initiative, the land-based Silk Road Economic Belt and the sea-based 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. In recent years, China has expanded its efforts with the introduction of the Digital Silk Road, Green Silk Road, Health Silk Road and Polar Silk Road. Developments in these four areas have already changed the BRI landscape. Delving into these specific dimensions of the BRI will further demonstrate the initiative's future roadmap and showcase a clear picture of relevant investment implications.

Among the four pillars introduced respectively in digital, green, health and polar, the Green Silk Road looks to make BRI projects greener and more sustainable. Chinese policymakers have increasingly focused on the sustainable BRI in recent years. The scope of the Green Silk Road includes reducing carbon emissions, cutting pollution and protecting biodiversity, while also ensuring improved economic opportunities for all countries involved.

We believe that there are three main reasons behind China's push to develop the Green Silk Road.

First, it fits into the growing global trend of prioritizing sustainable development. The Green Silk Road can be viewed as an effective solution to promote the implementation of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Green Silk Road also serves as a key enabler of China as it seeks to achieve its goals of peaking carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality by 2060. Climate change is one of humanity's greatest challenges and concerted efforts are required globally, especially in emerging and developing economies. These countries face rising energy needs as they grow, industrialize and urbanize. Infrastructure investment decisions today can lock in emissions trajectories for decades and make or break the ability of countries to achieve their sustainability objectives. This underscores the importance of the Green Silk Road in driving sustainable development in the Belt and Road region.

Second, since the launch of the BRI, Western academia and civil society have voiced concerns about the alleged environmental impacts of extensive infrastructure development. The Green Silk Road is a response to such criticism and lays a solid foundation for wider global recognition of the BRI.

Third, many countries involved in the BRI are lagging in terms of sustainable development. China's emphasis on the Green Silk Road allows the country to set green standards for BRI projects and make sustainability a defining feature of BRI cooperation agreements.

Looking back, we have witnessed that Green Silk Road progress demonstrates the great efforts undertaken in a broader sense.

Chinese officials have actively promoted the Green Silk Road by setting up various guidelines and partnership agreements. In late 2018, China released the Green Investment Principles (GIP) for the BRI — a set of principles for greener investments in countries and regions participating in the BRI. As of June 2021, 39 large international financial institutions had embraced the GIP. In 2019, the BRI International Green Development Coalition was established to engage in dialogue, exchanges, joint research, capacity building and other activities. It has since attracted more than 150 Chinese and foreign partners from more than 40 countries, and has garnered a positive response and widespread support from the international community.

In mid-2021, China also published the Green Development Guidelines for Overseas Investment and Cooperation and the Guidelines for Ecological and Environmental Protection of Foreign Investment Cooperation and Construction Projects. These two programs focus on environmental risk management for overseas BRI projects and supply chains.

As a key aspect of the BRI, Chinese officials have also shown significant commitment toward making energy investments in the BRI regions more sustainable. This has mainly been executed in two ways — reducing their coal-related investments and increasing their green energy investments.

Since Chinese officials declared their intention of minimizing the financing of coal power plants abroad, coal-related investments and construction projects dropped to around zero in 2021 and 2022. China is also highly committed to investments in renewable energy and solar, wind and hydropower in BRI-involved regions, which increased by 50 percent year-on-year in 2022. China dominates the global manufacturing industry for renewables, accounting for 72 percent of global solar manufacturing and 50 percent of global wind turbine manufacturing. It is thus well-positioned to help deliver low-carbon technologies to BRI countries and regions.

Chinese officials have also cooperated with local governments and corporations in countries and regions involved in the BRI to build green infrastructure. One notable example is the Lower Stung Russei Chrum hydropower station in Koh Kong province, Cambodia, which was built and is owned by a large Chinese electric company. The station entered into commercial operation in 2013 with a total installed capacity of 338 megawatts and an annual output of 1.2 billion kilowatt-hours. In operation since mid-2022, the project has generated more than 8.4 billion kWh of clean power and has helped advance Cambodia's transition toward the greater use of renewable energy.

Another example that involves technological innovation in the renewable energy sector is a floating solar farm in Huainan, Anhui province. The site's 160,000 solar panels were installed in 2017 by a large domestic renewable energy storage company covering a huge surface area of water that was formerly the site of a coal mine. These solar panels generate 150 megawatts of electricity a year, or the equivalent of about 53,000 metric tons of coal, demonstrating the potential of solar projects along the Green Silk Road.

Given the efforts mentioned thus far, we expect China's BRI projects to become greener and more sustainable over the long term. We believe developments across countries and regions involved in the BRI are likely to become more sustainable with time, which can in turn support better long-term investment opportunities there. Bond issuers looking to invest in sustainable development in those regions may benefit from this mega trend over the long run.

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The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

MOTORING

Carmakers see growth despite bumpy road felt across sector

NEVs lead the sales charge but some promotions blamed for interference

By LI FUSHENG
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Carmakers saw their sales in April soar from the same month last year, but the country's leading trade association said further efforts are needed to boost recovery in the world's largest vehicle market.

More than 2.13 million vehicles were produced in April and 2.16 million units sold, up 76.8 percent and 82.7 percent year-on-year, according to statistics released by the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers on Thursday.

The surges were primarily the result of a comparatively low base in the same month last year as the COVID-19 pandemic stalled production in major vehicle-producing cities, including Changchun, capital of Jilin province, and Shanghai.

But production and sales last month were down by 17.5 percent and 11.9 percent from March because of industry-wide promotional campaigns that almost verged on "irrational", said the CAAM.

The negative effects of such viral campaigns, which were started in February by some less popular brands to cut stock, have not yet fully gone and some potential consumers are still adopting a wait-and-see attitude, said Chen Shihua, deputy secretary-general of the CAAM.

This was reflected by sales of gasoline-powered passenger vehicles in April, which stood at 985,000 units, up 65.2 percent year-on-year, much lower than the industry's average of 82.7 percent.

That means the growth in the passenger vehicle segment was mainly driven by the new energy vehicles, which saw "remarkable growth" in the month, said Chen.

The association did not give a specific figure regarding passenger NEVs but sales of NEVs as a whole soared to 636,000 units in April, up 110 percent year-on-year and accounting for 29.5 percent of China's vehicle sales in the month.

Their sales from January to April totaled 2.22 million units, up 42.8 percent year-on-year. The CAAM estimated that NEV sales in 2023 could reach 9 million, up from 6.9 million in 2022.

Major NEV makers saw their sales soar in April. BYD sold more than 210,000 vehicles in April, up 98.5 percent year-on-year, consolidating its position as the No 1 NEV maker in the country. It was followed by Tesla, whose deliveries reached 76,000 units in the month.

MG models are lined up in SAIC's Ningde plant in Fujian province in March 2023. LI FUSHENG / CHINA DAILY

Other major automakers saw their NEV sales grow rapidly as well. SAIC sold 66,000 NEVs in April, with its total in the first four months exceeding 200,000 units, and GAC as well as Dongfeng followed, delivering 45,000 and 32,000 units respectively in the month.

Of the startups, Li Auto ranked first by selling 26,000 units in April, up 516 percent year-on-year. It was the only startup to make it into the country's top 10 best-selling NEV makers both in April and so far this year.

The growing popularity of NEVs helped carmakers' total sales in April. SAIC, China's largest carmaker by sales, delivered 373,949 units last month, up 124.5 percent from the same month in 2022.

Great Wall Motors sold 93,107 vehicles in April, up 73.14 percent year-on-year, the Hebei province-based carmaker said last week.

Of them, 14,863 were NEVs, soaring 284.06 percent year-on-year, as the carmaker is revving up efforts to shift toward electrification.

As China's largest SUV and pickup truck maker, Great Wall Motors showcased more than 30 heavyweight models at the Shanghai auto show in April, half of which were NEVs.

China's vehicle exports continued to grow as well. In April, carmakers shipped overseas 376,000 units, up 170 percent year-on-year and 3.3 percent from March.

Customers take a closer look at Li Auto's L9 model at the 2023 Shanghai auto show. CAO YINGYING / CHINA DAILY

Total exports in the first four months reached 1.37 million units, up 89.2 percent year-on-year. Of them, the majority were passenger vehicles, standing at 1.14 million units.

The General Administration of Customs said on Tuesday that vehicle exports from January to April were worth 204.5 billion yuan ($29.52 billion), up 120.3 percent from the same period last year.

SAIC exported 89,643 vehicles in April, bringing the total for the first four months to 346,696 units — up 64.99 percent from the January-April 2022 period.

SAIC expects its total exports to hit 1.2 million units this year, up from 1.02 million units in 2022, with Europe, the Middle East and Mexico among its major markets.

Great Wall Motors saw its overseas sales reach 21,814 units in April, up 182.09 percent year-on-year, accounting for 23.43 percent of its total deliveries for the month.

The automaker said it inked cooperation deals with dealerships from dozens of countries at the 2023 Shanghai auto show held in April, which further expanded its global reach.

In April, Great Wall Motors launched new energy models in the Philippines and Brazil. The company said it will enter other markets, including Singapore, Cambodia and Vietnam later this year.

Short Torque

Automakers risk future unused ICE capacity

Volkswagen and General Motors could have considerable unused production capacity for conventionally powered vehicles in China by 2030 if they do not speed up their transition to electric vehicles, Greenpeace said on Thursday. Greenpeace estimated that if new energy vehicles make up 40 percent of sales by 2030, a third of vehicle production capacity with internal combustion engine at 10 major automakers, including Volkswagen, Toyota and GM, could end up unused. GM and Volkswagen will face the most pressure with more than 3 million units of idled capacity for ICE cars in China, presenting a major risk for those automakers, Greenpeace said.

Tesla battery production delayed by Panasonic

Panasonic said on Wednesday that it will delay the commercial production of its 4680 battery cells championed by Tesla CEO Elon Musk and begin operations during the April to September period in 2024, later than previously scheduled, as the company aims to improve their performance. Tesla's Japanese supplier, Panasonic, previously planned to start volume production for Tesla between April 2023 and March 2024. "Mass production is rescheduled to begin during 1H FY3/25 to introduce performance improvement measures that will further enhance competitiveness," Panasonic said, referring to the first half of the fiscal year ending March 2025.

Toyota accelerates toward electrification

Toyota Motor Corp on Wednesday said it expects battery electric vehicle sales, including those of its luxury Lexus brand, to reach 202,000 worldwide this business year through March 2024 — up more than fivefold from 38,000 units last year. It has forecast operating profits would rise to 3 trillion yen ($22.2 billion) this business year. The growth plan was unveiled by the new CEO Koji Sato, installed last month, and signals a more aggressive push toward electrification by the Japanese firm that has previously pursued a go-slow approach to all-electric cars, arguing its strategy would provide more consumer choice.

Domestic models at Malaysia Autoshow

Chinese carmakers, including Hozon and Great Wall Motors, highlighted new energy vehicle models at the Malaysia Autoshow 2023, the largest motoring event in the Southeast Asian country. The models from Great Wall Motors included the Poer, the Haval H6 and Haval Jolion, the company said in a statement on Wednesday. Hozon launched its Neta V model at the event. Held at the Malaysia Agro Exposition Park Serdang on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, the Malaysia Autoshow 2023 ran from May 4 to 7 with a focus on electric vehicle models as well as relevant technologies and discussions on the electric vehicle ecosystem in Malaysia.

Volvo unveils new global design studio

Swedish carmaker Volvo opened a new design studio on Wednesday in Shanghai, which will be one of the automaker's three global design centers. Mirroring Volvo's design headquarters in Gothenburg, the Shanghai studio has all the functions needed to facilitate the entire design process, from concept to production, said the company. The 5,500-square-meter design studio boasts milling machines, 3D printers and fully equipped workshops for producing accurate models more efficiently than ever. The designers in the Shanghai facility also have access to virtual reality environments where they can explore designs in the virtual world.

AGENCIES-MOTORING

Customer complaints evolve with in-car tech

By CAO YINGYING

The growing prevalence of fast-evolving, connected intelligent features in new energy vehicles has resulted in a broader range of complex consumer complaints in the auto industry, said the China Consumers Association, which released the first-quarter consumer complaints last week.

In the first quarter of 2023, the association accepted 10,552 auto complaint cases. Of these, 41.9 percent were focused on issues with battery systems, drive systems and electronic control systems of the NEVs.

Consumer concerns have been heightened by battery safety issues, which have become a recurring reason for vehicle recalls.

As a case in point, Volkswagen Group recently announced the recall of more than 100,000 plug-in hybrid vehicles worldwide due to fire risk, according to a company spokesperson.

Automakers' practice of limiting charging power or battery capacity through remote system upgrades, known as "electricity locking", has gained attention as a means of reducing safety risks associated with battery use.

However, this behavior can result in decreased charging speed, reduced power and a shortened driving range.

The association reported a case in which a Shanghai customer surnamed Yan purchased an NEV advertised with a 400-kilometer range. However, the automaker later "upgraded" the vehicle without the owner's consent, causing the battery voltage to decrease and limiting the range to 250 kilometers. The consumer felt cheated after paying a high price for a long-range NEV.

Yan Jinghui, a Beijing-based auto analyst at the China Automobile Dealers Association, said that car manufacturers should communicate with car owners and seek proactive solutions to problems like electricity locking and charging speed limits.

It is important to inform owners beforehand rather than acting without their knowledge, Yan said.

Other issues are related to intelligent assistance systems, which lead to system crashes in the central control unit and failure of sensors such as radar and cameras, and brake failure.

The CCA advises auto companies to boost research and development efforts for power batteries, enhancing their life cycle and low-temperature performance, minimizing the risk of fire incidents to ease consumers' range anxiety and ensure driving safety.

NEV makers also should enhance R&D for intelligent connected vehicle technologies, improving the accuracy and safety of auxiliary systems, lowering the malfunction rates and preventing serious accidents, the association suggested.

The CCA also highlighted complaints regarding NEV sales, after-sales and support services.

Sales of NEVs often involve false advertising regarding range and configuration, according to the association.

Range is exaggerated or not consistent with actual performance, while advertised features may not be included or activated in purchased vehicles.

In terms of the complaints of charging infrastructure, the association recommends improving the supporting services for NEVs by optimizing the supply of charging stations and utilizing technologies like big data and artificial intelligence to promote the sharing of resources for private charging stations.

Bid to expand charging network into countryside

By CAO YINGYING
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China aims to accelerate the development of charging infrastructure to support the promotion of new energy vehicles in rural areas, where there is vast potential for growth.

This initiative is expected to not only boost rural consumption, but assist the growth of new industries such as rural tourism, officials said at a meeting earlier this month.

Several ministries have launched a "going to the countryside" campaign to promote the adoption of NEVs in rural areas for three consecutive years.

According to Xu Haidong, vice-chief engineer of the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers, the association has held 18 events across 16 cities in China. In them nearly 200 NEV models were launched, resulting in the sales of more than 4.1 million NEVs in rural areas.

Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the China Passenger Car Association, said the potential for promoting NEVs in rural areas is even greater than in large cities. This is due to China being an aging society and there are enormous opportunities presented by the development of NEVs for middle-aged and elderly people.

A customer charges his Zeekr model in Yantai, Shandong province, on May 5. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

As the popularity of NEVs continues to rise, so does the demand for charging stations.

China Merchants Securities has predicted that the demand for new charging stations could surpass 7 million units by 2025, with a corresponding market value of more than 160 billion yuan ($23.04 billion).

Similarly, CITIC Securities forecast that the public charging pile market will reach a size of 48.7 billion yuan within the next three years. The market is expected to enter an accelerated construction phase driven by policy and market demand, with a long-term potential of more than 100 billion yuan.

Despite China having the world's largest and most widely distributed network of charging facilities, with 6.09 million charging facilities nationwide as of April, the biggest concern for NEV buyers remains the inconvenience of charging.

One of the major issues is the shortage of charging piles.

According to the China Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Promotion Alliance, there were only 2.59 million charging facilities set up in 2022. But 6.9 million NEVs were sold during the same period, which indicates that the goal of one charging pile for one NEV is still far from being met.

Besides, there are other issues that the development of charging infrastructure still faces, such as the unreasonable layout of some public charging facilities, difficulty in installing charging stations in some residential areas, irregular operation of the charging market and inadequate maintenance of facilities.

In comparison to urban areas, the rural population and vehicles are more widely spread out, posing unique challenges for implementing sufficient charging infrastructure.

According to a representative from the China Southern Power Grid, as reported by Economic Information Daily, there may be initial obstacles in promoting NEVs in rural areas. These include low investment interest, profitability issues and equipment safety and stability in complex and remote environments.

The representative proposed the development of charging service stations that integrate solar power generation, energy storage, charging and swapping to meet the diverse demands of rural consumers and enrich the profit models of charging stations.

LIFE

Witness of history

A four-month exhibition provides an opportunity to reassess the life and times of Ming Emperor Wanli, **Wang Kaihao** reports.

Above: Wanli's gold crown (right) and crown for the empress (left) are among the highlights of the show. WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY

Top: Visitors at the National Museum of Classic Books are deeply impressed by the giant blue-and-white porcelain jar that was unearthed from Dingling. **Above left:** Imperial robes reflect refined craftsmanship and an etiquette system. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY
Above right: An exhibited replica of a Ming portrait of Emperor Wanli. The original piece is now in Taipei. WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY

In 1573, Zhu Yijun sat on the throne, as a 10-year-old boy and the ruler of an empire that had fallen from its apex.

That started the story of the longest-reigning emperor of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), whose life was full of controversies and legends — political unrest, tense relations with high officials and loneliness as a result of his "tiger mother", which together made it difficult for him to handle state affairs.

However, his 48-year rule had another side: economic boom, reviving links overseas, military triumphs, quenching rebellions, and successful efforts in fighting invaders. Better known as Emperor Wanli, he created a complicated era and left room for reminiscence to argue and judge.

An ongoing exhibition in Beijing might inspire viewers to re-evaluate his entangled life.

Co-organized by the National Library of China, Art Exhibitions China and several other institutions, the four-month exhibition *Encounter a Colorful Ming Dynasty in 1573: A Special Exhibition on Cultural Relics From Wanli Era* opened to the public in late April at the National Museum of Classic Books, located in the southern venue of the national library. The 137 artifacts, on loan from the Administration of the Ming Tombs, the National Centre for Archaeology and Beijing Art Museum, include gold, silver and jade items, textiles and porcelain.

"The artifacts not only represent the high level of art and craftsmanship during that time, they also demonstrate the royal aura and social features," Feng Xue, a curator of the exhibition, says.

The emperor's crown, which was knotted with more than 500 gold threads, is among the highlights of the exhibition. Each thread is no wider than 0.2 millimeters, and the crown weighs about 800 grams. A pair of dragons are entrenched on both wings of the crown, and some 8,000 gold "dragon scales" are used to decorate the crown, showcasing advanced techniques back then.

"This is the only artifact of its kind ever found in China," Feng says. "In an era when artisans only had experiences as references, it was tremendously challenging to uncover the exact right timing to both weld and create such an impeccable shape."

In the 1950s, China had its first and so far the only archaeological excavation of the Ming imperial tombs. Wanli's mausoleum, also known as Dingling, was opened. More than 3,000 cultural relics were found in his tomb. For example, the exquisite royal robes worn by the emperor and his empress may urge people to admire the refined artistic taste. However, they are also testimony of an etiquette system, emphasized throughout Chinese history.

"The Ming Dynasty ruled the country through a stratified etiquette system that is rooted in Confucianism," Feng explains. "The system guided politics, social and economic development, diplomacy and many other aspects of national governance, as well as people's daily behavior."

Apparently, constructing the grand mausoleum was a crucial part of this etiquette system. Emperor Wanli chose the location of his future resting place when he was only 21. It took six years to construct Dingling, the layout of which is almost a replica of his splendid lifetime home, the Forbidden City.

The living past

"Ancient Chinese people tended to treat their afterlife just like their lifetime," Feng says. "The splendor of Wanli's mausoleum reflects his regular lifestyle. He wanted to enjoy life even after it would go."

Among the exhibits are gold dining ware, miniature furniture made of bronze, coins inscribed with auspicious words to "keep off the devil", and jade ritual artifacts Wanli once used. Nonetheless, what he aspired for was probably more than his own peaceful resting place. A giant blue-and-white porcelain jar, with a diameter of more than 70 centimeters, expresses such hope. Grease was found inside the jar, indicting it was used to hold a lamp.

In Chinese, *ming* means "brightness". Through the so-called long-burning lamps, Wanli may have wished for his dynasty to forever live up to its name.

History failed Wanli's hope. The Ming Dynasty came to its end 24 years after his death — his grandson, Zhu Youjian, committed suicide the day the Forbidden City fell. Amid inflation, famine and chaotic wars, aspiration for dynastic longevity and lasting prosperity became a reverie.

"People may criticize Emperor Wanli for his role in the fall of the Ming, but his reign briefly reversed the declining tendency of the dynasty," Sun Xiaobing, deputy director of Art Exhibitions China, says. "Its inclusiveness and vivid urban life impress today's people and inspire us to imagine."

As many historians note, Wanli's era was a time of change.

Zhang Juzheng, a head politician, led reform in economic fields and official evaluations that had lasting influence later. Xu Xiake, a pioneering travel writer, toured the country for decades and presented a milestone geographical treatise.

Also during his reign, Italian Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci became the first European to enter the Forbidden City, opening the connections between the East and the West through cross-cultural communication. The isolationist policy upheld by his predecessors, which kept off pirates but restricted foreign trade, began to loosen and booming overseas trade across the high waves reemerged.

"Trade during the age of exploration brought material civilization from overseas into China and thus enabled exchanges and mutual influence among various cultures," Feng explains. "Urban culture boomed and the publishing industry particularly flourished. Communication of thoughts created amazing sparks and bred rich cultural fruits."

In 2007, archaeologists found a shipwreck off the coast of Nan'ao Island of Shantou, Guangdong province. It was believed to be from the late Ming, roughly the Wanli era. Most salvaged ceramics from the shipwreck, called Nan'ao One by archaeologists, were exported products of southern China, and now remain as physical evidence of the Maritime Silk Road.

Several such porcelain items from Nan'ao are also displayed at the exhibition.

"Since the mid-Wanli era, Chinese ceramics began to be traded overseas by Portuguese and Dutch merchant ships and were widely favored in Europe," Feng says. "European fashion was also introduced to China and thus influenced patterns of products in Chinese kilns."

Sleeping underwater for centuries, the glaze of the ceramics might have tarnished but their legendary saga lingers in history.

According to Zhang Zhiqing, deputy director of the national library, the numerous ancient books of the Ming Dynasty collected by the institution will allow visitors to further explore Emperor Wanli's stories through textural legacies. *Xu Xiake's Travels* and other precious original copies of Ming books are also exhibited in another gallery of the National Museum of Classic Books.

"We can dig deep into these ancient classics to find more historical experiences and wisdom," Zhang Zhiqing says. "They can be used as modern people's references and inspires us to further promote cross-cultural communication."

The history of 450 years may still be insufficient time to quieten the cacophony about Emperor Wanli. However, the exhibition at least tells people to keep thinking about and learn something from the past.

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Briefly

Illustrating fables

Marc Chagall (1887-1985) is most well-known for his paintings featuring surrealist scenes and colors that evoke in the viewer delight, a longing for love and sometimes slight sadness. In his 100 black-and-white etchings to illustrate *The Fables of La Fontaine*, Chagall presented a more serious state of mind, different from his popular dreamy images. His vivid explanations of the literary masterpiece by French poet Jean de La Fontaine, who lived in the 17th century, engage people in an investigation of human nature, and its good and cruel sides. A whole collection of Chagall's engravings of *The Fables of La Fontaine* is on show at Gallery Ici Labas in Beijing's 798 art zone. Chagall began to work with engraving in Berlin in 1922. He went on to make prints and illustrated for books to build a link between fine arts and

literature through his work. He barely understood French and had his wife translate *The Fables* into Russian. When he worked on the collection, he was inspired by the French landscape to show his passion for nature. He also borrowed materials from the cultural traditions of other countries. Ambroise Vollard, the influential French art dealer of the time, said there were similarities in the aesthetics of La Fontaine and Chagall, "both ingenuous and subtle, realistic and whimsical". The show runs through to June 4.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 798 East Street, 798 Art Zone, Beijing. 130-0117-0598.

Cultural exchange

Dimensions of Civilization is an ongoing project at the Art Museum of Sichuan Fine Arts Institute that aims to intensify the exchange of art and culture between China and Italy. It includes two exhibitions, one of which is *Italian Contemporary Art and Artists on the Silk Road* that features eminent figures and their representative styles of creation to touch upon the many aspects of Italian contemporary art. The narrative traces back the ancient Silk Road by

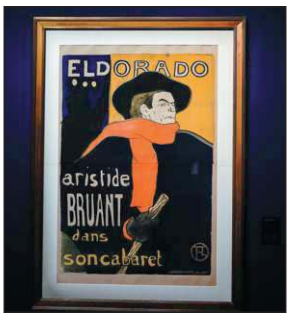
which commodities and cultures were exchanged between the East and the West, and how in the modern times, the traveling of art has further enriched the communication between cultures. The other exhibition is *The Return of Spring*, which shows the works of 16 Chinese and Italian artists whose creation have for the past five decades shaped the art landscapes of their own countries and meanwhile been introduced to the world stage. The two shows will end on May 26.

9:30 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 56 Daxuecheng South Road, Gaoxin district, Chongqing. 177-8408-0200.

Paris in prints

During his short life of 37 years, French artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec created thousands of paintings covering posters, prints, watercolors, oil paintings and sketch manuscripts. He rose to fame by depicting a vivid picture of the splendid nightlife in Paris, mainly portraying figures at entertainment venues, such as actors, singers and sex workers. The exhibition *Ethereal Life in Paris: A World Tour Exhibition With Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec* arrived in Beijing's Art Museum of the China Millennium Monument in late April after its tour of Shanghai earlier this year. It displays about 120 sets of artworks and more than 230 precious objects to offer a comprehensive glimpse into the artist's career. He was dubbed an observer and recorder of life, an innovator of art and design, and the "soul of Montmartre" in Paris. The show runs through to Sept 3.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays, 9 Fuxing Road, Haidian district, Beijing. 010-8418-7900



LIFE

“I am trying to find a way to tell the story of ancient Chinese culture in a very modern way.”

Thom Southerland, theater director

New musical unearths story of Sanxingdui excavation

By CHEN NAN

When award-winning theater director Thom Southerland was invited to join the production of an original Chinese musical, which aims to bring the archaeological discoveries from the Sanxingdui site to life onstage, he did some research about the site, which he found intriguing.

Sanxingdui site was discovered in Guanghan, Sichuan province, in 1929. Dating back at least 3,000 years, the site is best known for the numerous exotic-looking bronze and gold artifacts found in “sacrificial pits”. Since 2020, a new round of site excavations has attracted widespread domestic and global attention.

“I was amazed by those mysterious items from thousands of years ago. The mask is always in my mind. When I learned that the mask was created thousands of years ago, it seemed to be very unreal. I feel inspired,” says Southerland, who appeared in Beijing on May 8, when *Sanxingdui the Musical* was launched, referring to the gold mask discovered at the site. Southerland is excited, as he plans to visit the Sanxingdui Museum in Guanghan, which was built in the 1990s to keep, preserve, display, and research the archaeological discoveries from the site.

“It will be the most contemporary, yet traditional, musical with an original Chinese story. I am trying to find a way to tell the story of ancient Chinese culture in a very modern way. The challenge is apparent and unlike any other challenge I have met in my previous productions,” says the director. “With the musical, we celebrate Chinese culture and demonstrate it to all people.”

Southerland was in China in 2019 when the musical, *Titanic*, which he worked on as the artistic director, toured the country. He was impressed by the audience response, he says.

According to the musical’s production companies, including Beijing One World Culture Communication Co and Sichuan Province Song and Dance Theater Co, *Sanxingdui the Musical* will premiere in October and tour around the country and internationally.

Wang Yong, who wrote the script for the Chinese musical, says that, besides the archaeological discoveries from the Sanxingdui site, archaeologists are highlighted in the musical.

“The story will be told by the archaeologists. We’ve traveled to the museum to see those discoveries and talked with archaeologists, hoping to learn real stories about their work,” says Wang, a veteran playwright, who is the head of the China National Peking Opera Co.

“As well as pandas and hotpot, Sichuan, also known as Shu, is home to the Sanxingdui site, which provides valuable insight into its ancient civilization,” he says.

Chinese songwriters, Qian Lei and Tang Tian, are composers of the musical, which also has an international creative team, including stage designer Morgan Large, international consultant Philip Godawa and visual design consultant Stafeno Poda.

Young actors and actresses, who will perform in the new version of *The Orphan of Zhao*, pose with veteran artists of Beijing People’s Art Theatre in Beijing on May 8.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Classic tale of revenge still fascinates

Beijing group set to present adapted play that centers on justice and love, **Chen Nan** reports.

Known as China’s *Hamlet*, *The Orphan of Zhao*, which is a story of revenge, is one of the country’s most famous tales. Written by Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) dramatist Ji Junxiang, it was one of the first Chinese plays to be translated for Western audiences.

The story has been adapted into many art forms, such as a Chinese movie, *Sacrifice*, by director Chen Kaige, and an English play titled *The Orphan of Zhao* by the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Now, Beijing People’s Art Theatre is going to present a new version of the tale, which, directed by He Bing and featuring 17 young actors and actresses of the theater, will be staged in the capital from May 20 to June 5.

The new play, titled *The Orphan of Zhao*, is based on the theater’s 2003 version of the story, which was directed by Lin Zhaohua, who played one of the leading roles, Cheng Ying.

“It has been 20 years, and the experience of performing in the play and working with Lin still feels fresh to me,” says He. “I had never played in any theatrical productions like it. The play was very dreamy, glamorous and deep. Now, as a director myself, I want to share my experience and knowledge about *The Orphan of Zhao* with a younger audience. But this new play is nothing like the 2003 version, though we use the same script written by Jin Haishu.” *The Orphan of Zhao* is He’s directorial debut with the theater.

The play opens with Tu’an Gu, a favorite general of the emperor, framing and killing Zhao Dun, a political rival. Tu’an also slaughters most members of the Zhao family. Because Zhao’s daughter-in-law, Princess Zhuangji, is pregnant, she is the only one spared. After she gives birth to a son, the general tries to kill the baby, but Cheng Ying, a family friend and physician, smuggles the newborn away. The princess commits suicide to ensure the secrecy of the orphan’s whereabouts. To save the orphan, Cheng sacrifices his own newborn son.

“The play talks about the universal significance of justice and honesty and most importantly, love.”

He Bing, director of the new version of *The Orphan of Zhao*

“The audience will see the new talent that will play a key role in the theater’s future development.”

Feng Yuanzheng, president of Beijing People’s Art Theatre

Tu’an later takes Cheng and his wife as his proteges, and adopts their son — the orphan of Zhao — as his own. Sixteen years later, the orphan, now an adult, learns the truth about his identity and his family from Cheng and he has to make a choice.

“The play talks about the universal significance of justice and honesty and most importantly, love. We spent a long time working together to discuss the script. As an orphan, he is raised as a seed for revenge by Cheng Ying. But he is also an individual, who has his own ideas. It has been 16 years and could the hatred be gone already?” says He, who didn’t reveal the ending of the new play.

According to Feng Yuanzheng, president of the theater, who is also a veteran actor, the idea of adapting the classic Chinese story into a new play started from the annual evaluation of the theater’s young actors and actresses, who were assigned to submit their adaptations of classic scenes from the theater’s plays.

Two young actors, Jin Han and Zhou Shuai, worked on performing one scene from *The Orphan of Zhao*.

“They were loyal to the original script of the play, but they displayed their own interpretation. As a result, we decided to make a new play based on the classic tale,” says Feng, adding that the play will be staged at the theater’s new building, Beijing International Theatre Center.

“By gathering the 17 young actors and actresses, the audience will see the new talent that will play a key role in the theater’s future development,” Feng adds, mentioning that the theater will see about 20 artists retire over the next two years, which will bring a period of transition.

“We didn’t expect that our homework would be developed into a complete play,” says Jin, who plays the role of Cheng in the new version of *The Orphan of Zhao*.

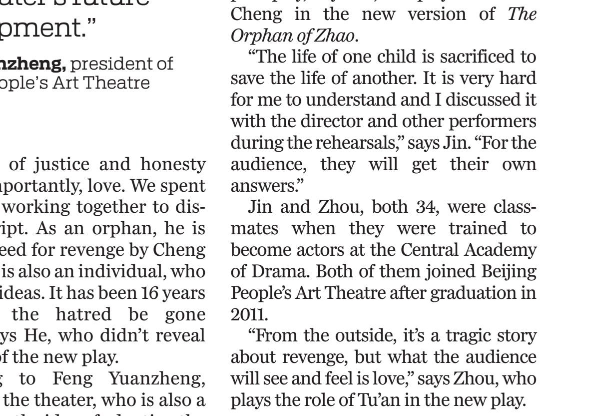
“The life of one child is sacrificed to save the life of another. It is very hard for me to understand and I discussed it with the director and other performers during the rehearsals,” says Jin. “For the audience, they will get their own answers.”

Jin and Zhou, both 34, were classmates when they were trained to become actors at the Central Academy of Drama. Both of them joined Beijing People’s Art Theatre after graduation in 2011.

“From the outside, it’s a tragic story about revenge, but what the audience will see and feel is love,” says Zhou, who plays the role of Tu’an in the new play.

Contact the writer at chennan@chinadaily.com.cn

Live performances set the stage for full recovery



A traditional opera actress interacts with a young audience member in Lucheng district, Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, during the May Day holiday. XINHUA

The charm of live performances is irreplaceable. China’s market for in-person shows enjoyed a hopeful spring after about three years of stagnation, and the five-day May Day holiday has given it new impetus.

Many Chinese chose to spend the holiday at outdoor music festivals, enjoying the nice weather and the chilled-out environment.

“I was literally crying,” says Jiang Shan, who traveled by high-speed train from Beijing to Shanghai during the holiday to see her favorite singer at the Restless Music Festival. She even purchased a VIP ticket for a better view.

“I could not wait to see his performance. So I went to Shanghai, and I will definitely go to his solo concert, set to be held in Hefei this summer,” she says.

Data from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism shows that 31,100 commercial shows were organized around the country during the five-day period, earning 1.52 billion yuan ($220 million) of ticket revenue and attracting 8.65 million audience members.

The ministry says on its official WeChat account that the trend of combining tourism with cultural elements is rising, adding that more people are inclined to include watching performances, visiting museums and exhibitions in their traveling itineraries.

Hotel reservations in areas where concerts and music festivals took place saw significant growth compared to previous years, and the festivals greatly boosted other areas of consumption in the host cities, according to the ministry.

Tickets for the Midi Music Festival in Yantai of East China’s Shandong province and the Strawberry Music Festival in Beijing were almost sold out, it says.

Pan Yan, vice-president and secretary-general of the China Association of Performing Arts, says the large number of major events launched during the holiday, and the increase of travelers, helped promote the performing arts sector nationwide.

During the holiday, concerts and music festivals brought over 1.2 billion yuan of extraneous consumption, mainly transportation, dining and accommodation, says Pan.

An office worker in Beijing surnamed Peng visited Nanjing, Jiangsu province, for the holiday, and attended a music festival in the city after she managed to get a ticket online. “Both the performers and the fans were very excited to be able to meet in person again after the COVID-19 pandemic,” she says.

Chinese audiences also enjoyed other forms of live performances during the holiday, such as small venue gigs, talk shows, comedy shows and interactive theater performances.

The Nanhu Theater Festival opened in Jiaxing, Zhejiang province, during the holiday, featuring theater dramas in a wide range of formats and traditional operas from all over the country.

China’s performance market has seen a revival since the beginning of this year. According to data from the CAPA, ticket revenue from commercial performances was close to 5 billion yuan in the first quarter, surging about 111 percent from a year ago; the number of audience members skyrocketed 143 percent to 22 million.

Activities over the May Day holiday have provided a good start to the second quarter. Schedules of many theaters and venues have been filled with concerts and other performances through to the end of the year.

With the enthusiasm and high demand for cultural experiences, industry analysts urge companies and theaters to deliver high-quality productions, noting that, while some of the online performance formats developed during the last few years will remain in the market, they will need to adapt to compete with traditional, in-person shows.

XINHUA

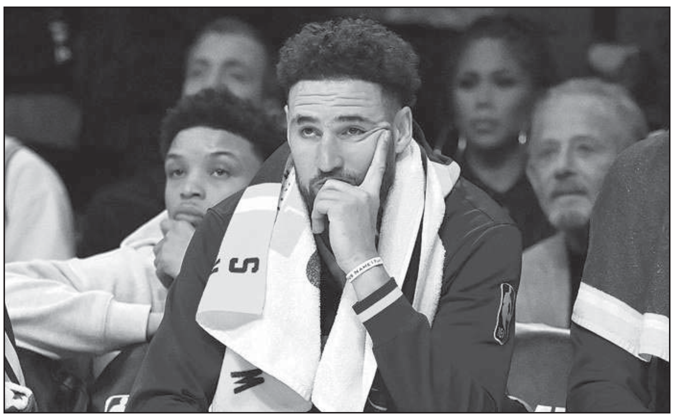
SPORTS

BASKETBALL

Golden State star Stephen Curry cuts a frustrated figure during the Warriors' Western Conference semifinals defeat to the Los Angeles Lakers on Friday. AP

Curry: Golden State dynasty not done yet

Steph expects Warriors' aging core to stay together despite chastening playoffs exit



A glum-looking Klay Thompson watches the Warriors' playoff defeat to the Lakers from the bench on Friday. AP

SAN FRANCISCO, California — Stephen Curry is far from ready to accept that these Golden State Warriors are done chasing championships together.

Draymond Green and Klay Thompson, too.

Same goes for Kevon Looney and Andrew Wiggins.

"No matter how different it looks, I think we understand each other, what we all bring to the table and trust that we're just gonna compete until the wheels fall off," the 35-year-old Curry said.

The defending champion's season ended in a 122-101 loss in Game 6 to the Lakers in Los Angeles on Friday night, the first time this core group of Curry, Green and Thompson have been eliminated before the NBA Finals after 19 straight playoff series wins against Western Conference opponents under coach Steve Kerr. Golden State also failed to win at least one road game after doing so in an NBA-record 28 consecutive series.

Sure, the Warriors have heard all the speculation that the Curry-led dynasty could be done. The franchise captured four titles over eight years, reaching the NBA Finals in five straight seasons from 2015-19.

"It's probably too raw right now for me to think about," Kerr said. "The one thing I will say is that Draymond, Klay, Steph, our core guys, they've got plenty left. There's still plenty in the tank there. I thought they all had great seasons. It may not have ended on a high note but all three guys are still high-level players and I still feel like this team has championship potential. We didn't get there this year but it's not like this is the end of the road."

Looney wasn't quite ready to fully look back at the season to evaluate the highs and lows — or why the Warriors never could consistently find their rhythm on the road. They went 11-30 away from Chase Center on the way to a 44-38 regular-season record.

"Last year after we won, I got a chance to reflect and think about all the great things that we did. But this year, still fresh. Still a sore spot getting put out in the second round," Looney said on Saturday with the Warriors back at Chase Center making offseason preparations and going through exit interviews.

"This group has been through a lot and I feel like we've got a lot more to give, and watching Steph, Klay and Draymond, what they did all season, what they did in the playoffs, was spectacular, and it obviously shows that they have a lot more to give."

Yet the quest for a repeat title began with Green punching Jordan Poole during training camp, then the Warriors worked through that team crisis only to struggle on the road and miss key players to injury for long stretches. The continuity was rarely there.

"Last year we were a little bit more together," Wiggins said on Saturday, adding: "I feel like the future's bright for this organization, all the players."

Looney and Wiggins — Curry, Green and Thompson weren't among those players to speak at the arena on Saturday — were still coming to terms with the disappointing early exit.

Golden State needed Curry's 50-point masterpiece in Game 7 at Sacramento in the first round to beat the Kings and become the first defending champion to rally from a 2-0 deficit.

Then he and Thompson struggled to knock down the key shots against the Lakers. Golden State's 365 missed 3-pointers in the first two rounds are the most in NBA history, topping the 2020 Rockets' 358. And after going a combined 6 for 26 from deep in the deciding Game 6, Curry and Thompson became one of only three pairs to each have missed 10 or more 3s in the same playoff game.

Now, they will part ways and work to regroup again — and see how the roster might change.

"I think obviously start at the top and work down in terms of trying to put together the best team possible next year," Curry said. "Making sure all the pieces fit and understanding how we can retool to put ourselves in position to be a legit championship contender, because for us that's all we're worried about."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Summer of flux awaits NBA's underachievers

Golden State has decisions to make now. Big decisions. Phoenix does, too. And Dallas. And Milwaukee. And Portland. And more.

It's the best time of year in the NBA — with the playoff field getting down to its final four on Sunday.

It'll be followed by the co-best time of year in the NBA — July, when free agency means some teams are going to wildly change.

The Warriors' reign as NBA champions ended Friday night with a loss to the Los Angeles Lakers, and it served as a reminder that nobody — not even a team with four titles in nine years — can escape the need to make changes. And if the enormous-spending Warriors need changing, then a whole lot of other teams do as well.

"I still feel like this team has championship potential," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "We didn't get there this year but it's not like this is the end of the road. But the organization has some decisions to make and we'll eventually get to that point."

They're not alone.

Consider: Milwaukee had the best record in the NBA this season, the No 1 overall seed and home-court advantage throughout the entirety of the playoffs. The Bucks won only one playoff game, wound up firing coach Mike Budenholzer and surely will consider how much deeper they want to get into the luxury tax – while also making sure they do enough to give Giannis Antetokounmpo more title chances.

"I believe we will have a very attractive position," Bucks general manager Jon Horst said. "We have the best player in the world. We have a championship culture and organization. We have great facilities. I think we have great respect around the league. So, I think we'll have a lot of options."

Expect a lot of comments like that in the coming days and weeks.

Coach Monty Williams paid the price for Phoenix's playoff frustration. Williams was fired on Saturday, with new owner Mat Ishbia clearly not impressed by two straight years of the Suns trailing by 30 points at halftime in elimination games at home. The Suns must also decide what to do with Chris Paul and Deandre Ayton.

Ishbia made an immediate splash after taking over by trading for Kevin Durant; he didn't do that with a second-round exit in mind. Devin Booker is probably just beginning to enter his prime, Durant is obviously closer to the end than the beginning but still elite, and the Suns will have no choice but to remain in win-now mode.

Dallas — which missed the playoffs — will need to make a decision on free-agent-in-waiting Kyrie Irving and what works best for Luka Doncic.

Portland has to figure out what to do to make Damian Lillard happy, meaning it has to either lure more talent or send him to a contender.

The Los Angeles Clippers might decide to make big changes after their season ended earlier than they wanted.

For the most part, the only teams that are truly happy with how their seasons have gone right now are probably Miami, the Lakers, Denver and the Boston-Philadelphia winner. They're going to be the last four standing.

"There's winning, and there's misery," Heat president Pat Riley famously says.

He's not wrong. Even some playoff teams know the current mix isn't good enough: Cleveland was exposed by the Knicks in the first round, Atlanta took two games off Boston and beat Miami in a play-in game but still must consider upgrades; Memphis was No 2 in the West entering the playoffs and went nowhere.

One team's path will get a little easier on Tuesday at the draft lottery, when a lucky club wins the right to select Victor Wembanyama next month. But that won't be any of the other teams that made the playoffs and fell short. They might go spending. They might make trades. They'll all do something.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Sun sets on Williams' Phoenix tenure

Monty Williams was fired as coach of the Phoenix Suns on Saturday. AP

The Phoenix Suns fired Monty Williams on Saturday, two years after reaching the NBA Finals and a year after he was the overwhelming choice as coach of the year.

Williams had great success in his four regular seasons in Phoenix, winning 63 percent of his games. But three consecutive years of playoff frustration was likely too much for the Suns to overlook — especially after two straight years of Phoenix trailing by 30 points at halftime of elimination games at home.

"Monty has been foundational to our success over the past four seasons," said James Jones, the Suns' president of basketball operations and general manager. "We are filled with gratitude for everything Monty has contributed to the Suns and to the Valley community."

Jones also said he made the decision to fire Williams.

The Suns had a 2-0 lead in the 2021 NBA Finals, only to lose in six games. They lost in the second round in each of the last two seasons, both times in a home finale — last year to Dallas, this year to Denver.

"Neither day feels good," Williams said after the loss earlier this week to Denver, when asked to compare last season's debacle to this year's season-ending loss.

Saturday likely didn't feel good, either.

The Suns now become yet another high-profile coaching opening, after Toronto fired Nick Nurse and Milwaukee fired Mike Budenholzer. Nurse won the 2019 NBA title with the Raptors, while Budenholzer was the coach who overcame Phoenix's 2-0 lead in the 2021 finals.

It's the second major move made by the Suns in the three months or so since new owner Mat Ishbia closed the sale that gave him control of the club. In February, Ishbia green-lighted a blockbuster trade that brought Kevin Durant to Phoenix and gave the Suns a core — him, Devin Booker, former No 1 pick Deandre Ayton and Chris Paul — that the team hoped would be enough to deliver a title.

It just didn't work, at least, not this year. Paul got hurt in the playoffs to continue his run of bad luck on the health front in the postseason, Ayton sat out the finale and Booker and Durant simply looked gassed by the time it was over. Williams, after the season ended, blamed himself.

"I take that personally, not having our team ready to play in the biggest game of the year," Williams said. "That's something that I pride myself on and it just didn't happen. ... That's something I have to take a deep look at, everything I'm doing."

Williams had been the coach with the fifth-longest tenure with his current team entering Saturday — just four years. Gregg Popovich has been coach in San Antonio since 1996, Erik Spoelstra in Miami since 2008, Steve Kerr in Golden State since 2014 and Michael Malone in Denver since 2015.

Phoenix becomes the fourth team to currently have an opening, along with the Raptors, Bucks and Detroit Pistons.

"When you look at really good coaches who have lost their jobs shortly after winning a championship, that's something that is just different about our business," Williams said on Friday, adding that "it's just a part of our NBA economy".

The Suns started 16-7 this season, looking every bit like a contender again. They were only 29-30 the rest of the way.

They used 26 starting lineup combinations, and had Durant for only eight regular-season games after the trade. They had to wait about a month after acquiring him for a January knee injury to heal, and then as he warmed up for what was supposed to be his home opener with the Suns on March 8 he slipped on the court during warm-ups, hurt an ankle and missed three more weeks.

The Suns were 12-1 in Durant's first 13 appearances, five of those in the playoffs. And then they went 2-4 against the Nuggets, all four losses by double figures. And Williams took the fall.

Williams was second in the official NBA coach of the year balloting in 2021, behind New York's Tom Thibodeau. He was the coach of the year that season as chosen by his peers in the National Basketball Coaches Association.

A year later, Williams was the NBA's winner — and the NBCA one yet again. Now, he's out, and the Suns will start anew.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

SPORTS

TENNIS

Wang Xiyu (left) and Zheng Qinwen battled through tough third-round matches in rainy conditions at the Italian Open over the weekend. They will play each other in the last 16 on Monday. GETTY IMAGES / XINHUA

China's resilient aces weather the storm

Zheng Qinwen, Wang Xiyu triumph in Rome rain to set up fourth-round clash

By SUN XIAOCHEN
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Not the weather, not their opponents and certainly not their least-favorite surface.

Nothing could apparently slow down Chinese duo Zheng Qinwen and Wang Xiyu at the Italian Open over the weekend as they overcame plenty of challenges to set up a highly anticipated all-Chinese round-of-16 battle on Monday.

Both women played amid sporadic rain in Rome which made the clay courts slippery and slowed the flight of the balls. Zheng defeated Hungary's Anna Bondar in straight sets on Saturday after Wang saved a match point to upend American ace Taylor Townsend in three sets.

Wang's victory sees her reach the fourth round of a WTA 1000 event for the first time, while Zheng will be making her third appearance at that stage, although she had never made it that far on clay before.

Representing China's next-gen on the women's circuit, the "derby" between Zheng and Wang underlines the country's continuing prowess in the elite women's ranks since the retirement of the so-called "Golden Flowers", led by two-time Grand Slam champion Li Na.

The two are stoked for what will be a rematch of their encounter at a WTA 125 tournament last June in Valencia, Spain, where Zheng prevailed 6-4, 4-6, 6-3.

"I think it's a great opportunity (to promote Chinese women's tennis). Playing a compatriot on the tour has been something of a rarity for me in recent years," said Wang after coming back from a break down in the decisive set to outlast Townsend 6-2, 0-6, 7-5 on Saturday afternoon.

"Zheng is a great competitor, almost top-20. I will need to try my best with each and every shot …I believe I can learn a lot from this match," said the 22-year-old world No 75.

The last time two Chinese players met in the fourth round of a WTA 1000 tournament was in March 2019, when Wang Qiang beat Wang Yafan in straight sets on a hard court in Miami.

Zheng, currently the top-ranked Chinese woman at No 21, expects nothing but a tough fight against the lefty again.

"She is a very aggressive player and sort of has an advantage serving with her left hand. I need to go all out for sure against such as a tough opponent. It will be another challenge for me," said Zheng, who withstood a flurry of Bondar's high-bouncing top-spin shots and the slow court to advance, 7-6 (2), 6-4, in two hours and seven minutes.

As a power-hitter who prefers the faster pace of hard courts, Zheng was particularly encouraged by her patience and commitment in coping with the conditions.

"The match today was a mental test more than anything," said Zheng. "The rain made the ball really heavy and slow. Her shots bounced high, disrupting my rhythm, and physically I am not 100 percent. I didn't play good tennis today. I just hung in there and tried to hit the ball back," said the 20-year-old native of Hubei province.

Wang Xiyu is enjoying a recent surge on clay, racking up two impressive victories over top-30 opponents — Canada's then 27th-ranked Bianca Andreescu in Madrid on April 29 followed by Romania's Irina-Camelia Begu (No 27) in Rome on Thursday.

Wang, who was developed at Beijing's 1123 tennis academy, credits the input of coach Nigel Sears for her recent breakthroughs.

Sears, who is the father-in-law of former world No 1 Andy Murray, has helped the likes of Daniela Hantuchova, Ana Ivanovic and Anett Kontaveit crack the world's top 10. The Briton began to work with Wang in February.

"It's a lot of details about my match, my technique. Sometimes I feel like it's too much but I'm trying to do my best and learn," Wang told wtatennis.com of Sears' influence.

"You need the technique to have the base to play tennis and play the match. That is very important. So I'm trying to build myself from the basics to be more complete."

Sears' tutelage touches on every aspect of Wang's game, from technique to footwork to mental strength.

Her growing confidence on the surface was on full display on Saturday.

In the damp conditions at Foro Italico, Wang built on her baseline firepower to dominate the opening set, yet began to lose her rhythm on her serve and groundstrokes as the rain came down heavier in the second set, where Townsend's power prevailed.

Trailing 5-4 in the decisive set with Townsend serving for the win, Wang held her nerve to save a match point and break the American doubles specialist twice while holding her own service game to pull off the win.

"Her serve and forehand were really strong. Also she plays slice shots well, so she has a complete game. This is something I need to learn from her," said Wang, who reached a career-high ranking of No 49 in January.

"It's a good experience for me because it's unusual for me to play in heavy rain. It was a learning process. I'm happy to make it this far, and I am raring to play more matches."

SOCCER

Much-changed Madrid grinds it out ahead of City showdown

BARCELONA — Real Madrid warmed up for its decisive Champions League semifinal trip to Manchester City with a 1-0 win over Getafe on Saturday in La Liga.

The champion's slim victory ensured leader Barcelona could clinch the title with victory at local rival Espanyol on Sunday.

Marco Asensio broke the deadlock in the 70th minute with a deflected strike from distance, in a game of few chances.

Madrid's win saw it climb provisionally second above Atletico Madrid, 11 points behind Barcelona.

Coach Carlo Ancelotti rotated heavily to keep his key players fresh ahead of the second-leg battle with Pep Guardiola's City, following the 1-1 draw last Tuesday in Madrid.

Ancelotti lined up with just three of the side that started the first leg — goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, Eduardo Camavinga and Fede Valverde.

Camavinga limped off in the final stages with knee pain sustained in a clash with Juan Iglesias.

Ancelotti said the French midfielder would not take long to recover.

"He twisted his knee a bit, it's a blow, nothing more, he will recover very quickly," Ancelotti told reporters.

"Tomorrow he will rest like the others who played today and I think from Monday he will train with the team, he doesn't have a problem."

Ancelotti added: "The knee is stable, it hurts him a bit now, but the important thing is stability and he has that, 100 per cent."

The most excitement Madrid supporters had in the first half was the team presenting the Copa del Rey trophy it won last weekend in Seville to the Santiago Bernabeu.

Beyond that the opening period was devoid of action at either end, with Belgian forward Eden Hazard looking unsurprisingly flat on his first league start since September.

A forgotten man at Madrid since failing to hit the heights following a 2019 move from Chelsea, the 32-year-old winger showed no signs of life.

Ancelotti, disgruntled by his team's lackluster display, brought on midfielder Toni Kroos for Ferland Mendy at halftime and moved Camavinga to leftback. Vinicius Junior and Luka Modric soon followed off the bench.

Courtois produced a fine save to deny Iglesias as relegation-battling Getafe hunted for vital points.

However, Asensio sent Madrid ahead with 20 minutes remaining when his long-range shot deflected off Nemanja Maksimovic and past the helpless David Soria.

"I'm trying to take advantage of the chances the coach gives me," Asensio told DAZN.

"We knew that it would be a tough game against a team that is strong defensively."

Asensio almost doubled his tally with a header from Kroos' fine cross but Soria pulled off an impressive save to deny him.

The defeat left Getafe 18th, in the relegation zone, level on points with Valencia, which was 17th ahead of a trip to Celta Vigo on Sunday.

Submarine rising

Earlier on Saturday, Villarreal romped to a 5-1 win over Athletic Bilbao to cut the gap to fourth-place Real Sociedad to five points.

Girona held Sociedad to a 2-2 draw earlier on, giving Villarreal a sliver of hope that it can usurp the Basque side in the race for Champions League qualification.

Quique Setien's Yellow Submarine took full advantage with an emphatic victory over Athletic, inspired by Senegalese forward Nicolas Jackson.

The 21-year-old netted a brace to take his tally to six goals in his last four games. Alex Baena also scored twice and Aitor Paredes put through his own net.

Imanol Alguacil's Sociedad took a two-goal lead on Girona through a Mikel Oyarzabal penalty and veteran playmaker David Silva.

However the visitor fought back to equalize, with Yan Couto and Cristhian Stuani netting.

"The way the team's played in the final phase of the season is keeping me calm," said Alguacil.

"There are no easy games, but with the team playing how it is, we have to be optimistic."

Sociedad visits Barcelona next weekend and must also travel to Atletico Madrid in its last four league fixtures.

AFP

Messi jeered on return as PSG edges closer to historic title

PARIS — Paris Saint-Germain closed in on a record 11th French league title with a 5-0 home win over Ajaccio on Saturday as Lionel Messi received a mixed reception on his return from suspension.

Fabian Ruiz opened the scoring on 22 minutes at Parc des Princes and Achraf Hakimi added a second goal before Kylian Mbappe struck twice shortly after halftime.

Mohamed Youssouf compounded a miserable night for the Corsican side with an own goal for PSG's fifth, while Hakimi and Ajaccio midfielder Thomas Mangani were sent off after a late bust-up.

PSG needs four points from its final three games — against Auxerre, Strasbourg and Clermont — to secure the Ligue 1 title after restoring its six-point lead over second-placed Lens.

"The players were very determined to put in a proper display. They want to be champions and they realize that Lens aren't giving up and that a misstep could raise the pressure," said PSG coach Christophe Galtier.

Messi's name elicited a combination of whistles and applause when it was read out before kickoff after he was banned by the club for the previous weekend's match over an unauthorized trip to Saudi Arabia.

The Argentine again drew jeers with his early touches in what was likely his penultimate appearance in Paris ahead of a move for the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner — Saudi Arabia, former club Barcelona and Inter Miami have all been reported as possible destinations.

"So there are whistles but very quickly a large part of the stadium made sure to drown them out to support Leo," said Galtier.

"He stayed focused with the desire to liven up the game and create chances. He's used to it because he's been in difficult situations in his career."

Kylian Mbappe celebrates scoring Paris Saint-Germain's fourth goal with Lionel Messi during Saturday's 5-0 win over Ajaccio at Parc des Princes in Paris. REUTERS

Three defeats in its past four home games for PSG had allowed Lens to stay in an unlikely title race, but Ajaccio offered little resistance as the minnow's relegation to Ligue 2 was confirmed.

Danilo's threaded pass was flicked into the path of Ruiz and the Spain midfielder finished clinically for his second goal in as many games.

Hakimi then swept in the rebound after Mbappe's effort was parried by goalkeeper Francois-Joseph Sollacaro.

Mbappe hit the 25-goal mark for the fourth time early in the second half, slotting beyond Sollacaro after a scramble in the box.

He then produced a brilliant first-time volley to lash in PSG's fourth. An unfortunate Youssouf diverted a shot from Marquinhos into his own net on 73 minutes and both teams finished with 10 players after a challenge on Messi triggered a scuffle.

Hakimi, who was sent off against Lorient two weeks ago, received his second red card in as many outings after getting into an altercation with Mangani, who was also dismissed.

Express Diallo

Senegalese forward Habib Diallo scored inside the opening minute for the third Ligue 1 game this year as he got both goals in Strasbourg's 2-0 win over Nice.

Diallo took his goal tally to 20 for the season and secured a fourth victory in five matches for Strasbourg which lifted it six points clear of the relegation zone.

Over two-thirds of his goals have come since January, when Strasbourg was second from bottom.

AFP